



OTHELLO

THE MOOR OF VENICE

WITH INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES

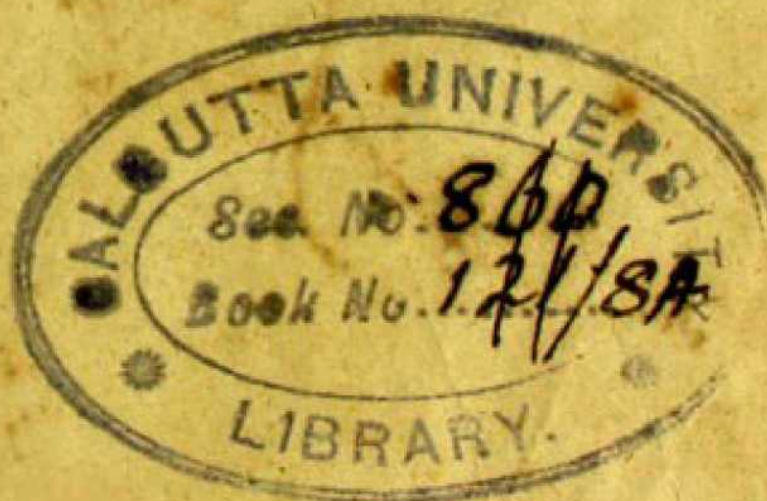
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PUBLISHED BY THE
UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA

1921



BEV 701

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GS 2634

PRINTED BY ATULCHANDRA BHATTACHARYA,
AT THE CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY PRESS, SENATE HOUSE, CALCUTTA.

PREFACE

THE present edition of *Othello* was taken in hand, like *The Comedy of Errors*, at the invitation of the Board of Studies in English of the University of Calcutta.

An editor's first duty is to secure a sound and accurate text. There is, unhappily, no standard text of Shakespeare, and the divergences to be found in the case of *Othello* when we compare the texts of the most approved editions are often curious and striking. The following examples are supplementary to those in the foot-notes and Appendix:—

Oxford: By this hand, I say, it is very scurvy, and begin to find myself fobbed in it.

Globe: Nay, I think it is scurvy, and begin to find myself fopped in it.

Globe: I'll beat the knave into a twiggen bottle.

Cambridge: I'll beat the knave into a wicker bottle.

Eversley: A fixed figure for the time of scorn
To point his slow unmoving finger at!

Arden: The fixed figure for the time of scorn
To point his slow and moving finger at!

Irving: The fixed figure for the time, for scorn, etc.

All the above: *Roderigo* (to *Iago*): I will do this, if I can bring it to any opportunity.

The present edition: I will do this, if you can bring it to any opportunity.

In this last example opinion so preponderates in favour of the Quarto "I" that the Folio "you" can scarcely be



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known except to specialists. Yet if we are not mistaken the text in the Folio is the better of the two—certainly the more pregnant. It brings out the clinging character of the timorous speaker (see 1. 3. 369, 2. 1. 273, and 5. 1. 3-7); and it farther serves to manifest Iago's part in this play as the creator and commander of occasions. The Venetians have just landed in Cyprus, and Iago in his racing imagination has already devised half a dozen preliminary steps (see his preceding speeches) to make it easy for Roderigo to start a quarrel with Cassio, that thereby he may get his plot set going. Roderigo's speech (as we understand it) means that he will play his little part if Iago will play his big part; which Iago further undertakes to do in his next words, "I'll warrant thee." See pp. 92-93.

The rule in this edition has been not to depart from the authority of the Folio without some tolerable reason; but the Quarto has been used to correct its numerous errors and to supplement the text where the Censor has cut out oaths and expletives. Textual emendations are few but not unimportant, and are pointed out in the notes. No original emendations have been attempted, but some new interpretations will be found in the notes. Several of the longer annotations are on matters not dealt with in the commentaries, such as those on pp. 47, 79, 122, 174, 219, 236, 261, 268-9, 281 and 285.

We have retained several commonly discarded typographical features of the original Quarto and Folio (especially of the Folio) when not inconsistent with modern usage. On this head see the textual notes on



pp. 19, 27, 98, 110, 197 and 247. The numbering of the lines is the same as in the *Globe Shakespeare*.

Just as these pages are passing through the press, the newspapers are telling us about two "social vampires" quite unmistakably of the Iago breed, one of whom has been run to earth in New York and the other in Vienna. Like the protean villain of our play it was no small part of their accomplishment to be able to pass themselves off in all societies as the best of good fellows and as men of sterling and unassailable honesty. And yet some critics, discussing the question *in vacuo*, have arrived at the strange conclusion that Iago is a monstrosity impossible in actual life!

Though *Othello* is not a play for schoolboys, yet its whole moral tendency is such as to make it an incomparable *vade mecum* for young men. This aspect is never lost sight of in Principal Miller's study of the play in a book accessible to all Indian students, *Shakespeare's Chart of Life: being Studies of Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, and Macbeth* (Natesan & Co., Madras).

The editor takes this opportunity to acknowledge his great obligations to Miss M. D. Whitehouse, M.A., and to his colleague Mr. J. C. Kydd, M.A., for their kindness in reading through his proofs and giving him many helpful suggestions in the preparation of this book. He has also to thank Messrs. Macmillan & Co. for permitting him to include in the Introduction some material which has already appeared in his editions of *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*, published by them.

ERRATA

On p. xxxii for *Personal Tale* read *Personal Talk*.

On p. 239 (l. 5 from bottom) for "the quotation" read "the line following the line quoted."

On p. 285 (middle of page) for "the words of in" read "the words of Othello in."



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"Shakespeare's youth fell at a time when the English people were importunate for dramatic entertainments. The court took offence easily at political allusions, and attempted to suppress them. The Puritans, a growing and energetic party, and the religious among the Anglican church, would suppress them. But the people wanted them. Inn-yards, houses without roofs, and extemporaneous enclosures at country fairs, were the ready theatres of strolling players. The people had tasted this new joy; and, as we could not hope to suppress newspapers now;—no, not by the strongest party,—neither then could king, prelate, or puritan, alone or united, suppress an organ, which was ballad, epic, newspaper, caucus, lecture, punch, and library, at the same time. Probably king, prelate, and puritan, all found their account in it. The best proof of its vitality is the crowd of writers which suddenly broke into this field: Kyd, Marlowe, Greene, Jonson, Chapman, Dekker, Webster, Heywood, Middleton, Peele, Ford, Massinger, Beaumont, and Fletcher."

Emerson, *Representative Men*.

"The heightened consciousness of mankind in the Periclean age gave utterance for the first time to the conception of human nature as such, and in Elizabethan England the same conception, enriched by the gathered experience of two thousand years, found varied utterance; and nowhere more completely than in the drama. Of either of the two periods in which tragic dramas of the highest order were composed it may be said with truth that it was a time of great national triumphs, of world-wide interests, of great political crises, great attempts, great successes, great reverses; in which all the powers of humanity for good and evil were manifested with extraordinary energy. Experience does not lead us to suppose that tragedy is most enjoyed in periods of exhaustion and depression. The reverse has really been the case. The mind in low states of vitality seeks for lighter modes of recreation and refreshment. It is then we hear it said, as is often repeated at the present day, 'Life is full of real unhappiness; why make us weep over imaginary woes?'"

Lewis Campbell, *Tragic Drama*.

LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE

EXTENT OF OUR KNOWLEDGE

SHAKESPEARE was the subject of much praise—most of it in verse—both in his lifetime and soon after his death, but neither did he himself write his own memoirs nor did any contemporary write a biography of him. The wonder is that we know as much about him as we do. It was not till ninety-three years after Shakespeare's death that any attempt was made to write his life. Rowe's *Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespeare*, prefixed to his annotated edition of the plays (1709), contains seven meagre pages of personal matter derived from traditions handed down through the seventeenth century and communicated to him by Betterton the actor (1635-1710). Later eighteenth-century editors—Pope, Theobald, Johnson, and Steevens—seem to have spent no pains over the subject and did little or nothing to supplement the material collected by Rowe. Steevens regarded such a task as hopeless :

“All that is known,” he wrote, “with any degree of certainty concerning Shakespeare is—that he was born at Stratford-upon-Avon—married and had children there—went to London where he commenced actor, and wrote poems and plays—returned to Stratford, made his will, died and was buried.”

The next great Shakespearian scholar to appear was Malone (1741-1812), an Irishman, who took up these words of Steevens as a personal challenge and spent many industrious years in a fruitful search for additional details



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about Shakespeare's personal history. His *Life of Shakespeare* is still found to be a rich storehouse of biographical information. Malone was followed by other equally zealous inquirers in the same field during the nineteenth century—Collier, Halliwell-Phillipps, Fleay, etc.—whose researches have lifted Shakespeare's biography out of the region of tradition and conjecture. The best result of their labours has been to replace Shakespeare in his actual environment, to re-create and to illuminate the world in which he lived and moved and had his being.

EARLY LIFE AT STRATFORD

The poet's father was John Shakespeare, a Warwickshire yeoman, who left Snitterfield and settled in Stratford-on-Avon about 1551. According to Rowe, he was "a considerable dealer in wool." The poet's mother was Mary Arden, a lady of gentle birth and the heiress of Asbies, an estate near Stratford. Their first two children died in infancy. The poet William was the third child, and according to tradition was born on April 23rd (St. George's day), 1564. The house in Henley Street where he was born is a substantial half-timbered dwelling, and has long been a place of pilgrimage to lovers of Shakespeare. It became the property of the nation in 1847.

After his marriage John Shakespeare began to rise in the world. The Stratford records show that in 1557 he was elected a burgess, that in 1565 he became an alderman and began to be styled "Mr.," and that in 1568 he reached the highest municipal honour, the office of high bailiff (equivalent to mayor). During his tenure of this



office play-actors were allowed for the first time to give performances in Stratford—a fact of some significance, one would imagine, in the poet's biography.

Although no actual record exists of Shakespeare having ever been at school, it may safely be assumed that he was sent at the usual age to Stratford Grammar School, which was free to all sons of burgesses. From 1571 to 1577 the schoolmaster was one Simon Hunt, a B.A. of Oxford. Some have pretended to see his portrait in the pedagogue who frequently makes his appearance in Shakespeare's earlier plays (Pinch in *The Comedy of Errors*, Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost*, etc.).

The tide of John Shakespeare's worldly prosperity reached its height about 1577, from which date it steadily declined till his son rose in the world. The estate of Asbies was mortgaged in 1578 for £40. For years thereafter we hear of nothing but financial difficulties and ruinous lawsuits, but through it all Shakespeare's father never forfeited the esteem of his fellow-townsmen. William was probably withdrawn from the Grammar School at the age of fourteen that he might assist in supporting the family.

There were now several younger children to be provided for. Three other sons, Gilbert (b. 1566), Richard (b. 1574), and Edmund (b. 1580), and a daughter Joan (b. 1569), all reached maturity; a daughter Ann (b. 1571) died in 1579.

In 1582, when he was in his nineteenth year, Shakespeare married Anne or Agnes Hathaway, daughter of a substantial yeoman of Shottery, a pretty hamlet within a mile of the town. Anne was eight years his senior, and it has been assumed by many biographers that the marriage was hasty and imprudent and in its results an



unhappy one. Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps maintains that there is not a particle of evidence for these assumptions, and Mrs. Stopes sees reasons for believing that "Shakespeare was even *fortunate* in his marriage."

Their first child was born in 1583, and was named Susanna; next came the twins Hamnet and Judith, born in 1585.

A tradition preserved by Rowe says that Shakespeare incurred the displeasure of Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote, the principal landowner near Stratford, in consequence of a poaching adventure upon his private grounds.

This story is almost certainly authentic,¹ and throws light upon the opening scene of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, where Robert Shallow, Esq., a pompous country justice, comes up from Gloucestershire to Windsor to make a Star-chamber matter of a petty poaching affair on his estate. The *comic* scene between Shallow and Falstaff was in all likelihood played in *earnest* between Sir Thomas Lucy and William Shakespeare about 1587, and may have been the occasion of our poet's turning his back upon his native town.

The dates of Shakespeare's departure from Stratford and arrival in London cannot be fixed with certainty. Fleay connects these events with the visit of Lord Leicester's company of actors to Stratford in the year just named, conjecturing that Shakespeare joined the company at the time of their visit and continued touring with them till they returned to the metropolis.

¹ "It is worth remarking that the Shakespeare traditions that have come down to us are, in the main, good traditions."—Raleigh, *Shakespeare*, p. 43.



CAREER IN LONDON

No period in Shakespeare's career is more obscure than his earliest years in London. But we can be certain that they were spent in unremitting toil with a view to equipping himself for his future work. For his "right happy and copious industry" we have the testimony of the dramatist Webster.¹ That he was first employed on the stage as a call-boy or prompter's assistant, or that for some time he earned a living by holding the horses of gallants outside the theatre, are stories that may be dismissed as idle gossip. But there is good ground for the tradition that he early became acquainted with James Burbage ("player and joiner"), who in 1576 erected in Shoreditch a wooden structure known as "The Theatre," (because it was for many years the only one in London), and here it was that Shakespeare probably served his apprenticeship as an actor.

But he was not for long content with merely acting. He soon conceived an ambition to write plays of his own. Robert Greene, a graduate of Cambridge and a writer of comedies for the stage, after a life spent in debauchery, was sinking into an early grave in the September of 1592. As he lay dying he wrote his *Groatsworth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance*, in which occur the following words :

"Yes, trust them not [the players]: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tiger's heart wrapped in*

¹ "That full and heightened style of Master Chapman, the laboured and understanding works of Master Jonson;...and lastly (without wrong lastly to be named), the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakespeare, Master Dekker, and Master Heywood" (John Webster, *Dedication to the White Devil*, 1612).



a *player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bumbast out a blank verse as the best of you : and being an absolute *Johannes factotum* [jack of all trades] is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country. Oh that I might intreat your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses, and let these apes¹ imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions."

This curious passage throws a good deal of light upon Shakespeare, for that "Shake-scene" is a pun on our dramatist's name hardly admits of doubt. Possibly it might have been Shakespeare's *nick-name*. The line quoted by Greene is a travesty of one which occurs in *3 Henry VI* (1. 4. 137) :

"O tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide !"

The term of reproach applied to him, "*Johannes factotum*,"

"is a tribute to Shakespeare's industry and practical ability. From the beginning of his career he must have been in the widest and best sense a 'utility man,' ready to do any work connected with the theatre and stage, eminently successful in anything he undertook." Baynes, *Shakespeare Studies*, p. 104.

But the main conclusion to be drawn from Greene's often-quoted words is that Shakespeare had taken a very important step upwards in his profession, that he had gone beyond his province as an actor and was assuming the rôle of a play-writer.

The "upstart crow" was beautifying his plumage with the feathers of other birds ; in other words, Shakespeare was revising and embellishing plays written by Greene and his Cambridge friends—Marlowe, Peele, and Nashe. And the sore point was that the plays of the University wits (as these four men were called) met with ill success

¹ "Ape" was a regular term of abuse applied in those days to actors.

till the newcomer took the same in hand and, by the help of his practical knowledge, adapted them for stage representation. By lopping-off excrescences and inserting a few masterly touches of his own, Shakespeare could "pull a play together" and make a popular success of it.

The company of actors to which Shakespeare belonged enjoyed the patronage both of Elizabeth and James the First, and frequently performed at court. In the Christmas of 1594, along with Richard Burbage the tragedian and William Kemp the comedian, Shakespeare visited Greenwich Palace and gave two performances before the Queen. The three received for this visit a fee of £20, equivalent to £160 of our money.

Ben Jonson refers to Shakespeare's performances at court in the well-known lines :

Sweet Swan of Avon ! what a sight it were
To see thee in our waters yet appear,
And make those flights upon the banks of Thames,
That so did take Eliza and our James !

The company had four successive patrons, and four successive designations, *viz.*, the Earl of Derby's, the Lord Chamberlain's, Lord Hunsdon's and (after James's accession) the King's Players.

Francis Meres, a graduate of Cambridge and a professor of Rhetoric at Oxford, in his *Palladis Tamia, Wit's Treasury*, published in 1598, assigns to Shakespeare the chief place among the writers of the day. He speaks of him as "the most passionate among us to bewail and bemoan the perplexities of Love." "The Muses," he asserts, "would speak Shakespeare's fine-filed phrase, if

they would speak English." The following passage from Meres's book is of the utmost importance in the study of the chronology of Shakespeare's plays (twelve are enumerated, six comedies and six tragedies):

"As *Plautus* and *Seneca* are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage: for Comedy, witness his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love's Labour's Lost*, his *Love's Labour's Won*, his *Midsummer's Night's Dream* and his *Merchant of Venice*; for Tragedy, his *Richard the Second*, *Richard the Third*, *Henry the Fourth*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet*."

Love Labour's Won is probably the same as *All's Well that Ends Well*.

The only works of Shakespeare that are known to have been published with his consent and co-operation were the two companion-poems, *Venus and Adonis*, (which he calls "the first heir of his invention"), published in 1593, and *Lucrece*, its graver companion, published in 1594. Both of these poems were dedicated to the young Earl of Southampton; the second in more familiar terms than the first, showing a growing intimacy between Shakespeare and his patron.

These were amongst the most popular poems of the day, and passed through several editions in the poet's lifetime. The printer was Richard Field, a Stratford man, who rose to be Master of the Stationers' Company, and was one of Shakespeare's most intimate friends.

Meres describes Shakespeare's poems and sonnets in these high-flown terms:

"As the soul of Euphorbus [the Trojan chief] was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweet-witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare; witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugared sonnets among his private friends," etc.

The volume of *Sonnets* was not printed till 1609, but for many years they had circulated in manuscript. Into the perplexing questions connected with their history and interpretation it is impossible to enter here—"There are many footprints around the cave of this mystery, none of them pointing in the *outward* direction."

In 1599 the Globe Theatre came into existence, and Shakespeare was one of the original shareholders. Previous to this time he had taken up his residence at Bankside in Southwark, which was the principal resort of London actors. Here he resided during his remaining years in the capital.

STRATFORD ONCE MORE

There is no doubt that Shakespeare's thoughts often turned to his home in Stratford, where, in 1597, he bought New Place, locally known as the "Great House," because it was the largest residence in the town. Aubrey the antiquarian preserves a tradition that he used to visit home once a year.

The parish church at Stratford contains records of some of the chief events of his private life. He lost his only son Hamnet in 1596; the boy was eleven and a half years old. He lost his father in 1601. The old man's last years were free from financial embarrassments. His application for a coat of arms, originally made as far back as 1568, was granted him through his son's influence with the College of Heralds in 1596. In 1607 Susanna Shakespeare married John Hall, a medical practitioner of Stratford. Shakespeare's mother died in 1608.



The poet's last years were spent in his native town. He took up his abode at New Place about the year 1611, and began to make large purchases of land in the neighbourhood. As actor, play-writer, stage-manager, and owner of theatrical shares, he had accumulated a large fortune, and according to local tradition preserved by Rev. John Ward, vicar of Stratford, "spent at the rate of £1000 a year," equivalent to £8000 of our money. His daughter Judith married Thomas Quiney, a vintner of Stratford, in February, 1616. Shakespeare signed his will in the following month, and died (of what illness we are not told) on April 23, 1616, when he had just completed his fifty-second year. He was buried on April 25.

"The news of Shakespeare's death," says Sir Sidney Lee, "reached London after the dramatist had been laid to rest amid his own people at Stratford. But men of letters raised a cry of regret that his ashes had not joined those of Chaucer, Spenser, and Beaumont in Westminster Abbey. William Basse, an enthusiastic admirer, gave the sentiment poetic expression in fourteen lines, beginning—

Renowned Spenser, lie a thought more nigh
To learned Chaucer, and rare Beaumont lie
A little nearer Spenser, to make room
For Shakespeare, etc.

Ben Jonson apparently alludes to these fantastic words in his "Commendatory Verses" in the First Folio (1623) when he says—

I will not lodge thee by
Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie
A little further to make thee a room.

His body lies in the chancel of Stratford Church ; the following lines are inscribed on his grave :

Good friend for Jesus sake forbear,
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And curst be he that moves my bones.

The monument on the north wall of the chancel, referred to in the Folio of 1623, bears the following inscription :

Judicio Pylum, genio Socratem, arte Maronem.
Terra tegit, populus maeret, Olympus habet." ¹
Stay, Passenger, why goest thou by so fast ?
Read if thou canst, whom envious death had plast
Within this monument ; Shakespeare with whom
Quick nature died ; whose name doth deck this tomb
Far more than cost ; sith all that he hath writ
Leaves living art but page to serve his wit.

The church is cruciform, with a most extraordinary deflection of the chancel to the north, said to represent the drooping of Our Lord's head on the cross. The following is a translation ² of the Latin inscription 'on the tomb of Shakespeare's wife :

Milk, life thou gavest. For a boon so great,
Mother, alas ! I give thee but a stone ;
O ! might some angel blest remove its weight,
Thy form should issue like thy Saviour's own.
But vain my prayers ; O Christ, come quickly, come !
And thou, my mother, shalt from hence arise,
Though closed as yet within this narrow tomb,
To meet thy Saviour in the starry skies.

The Stratford bust is faulty as a piece of workmanship, yet it permits us to think of Shakespeare as "a man cast in the antique mould of humanity, equable, alert, and

¹ "In wisdom a Nestor, in genius a Socrates, in art a Virgil. The earth shrouds him, the nation mourns him, Olympus holds him."

² The editor is indebted for this translation to the Vicar of Stratford.



gay." The allusions in contemporary writings referred to in the opening words of this brief sketch speak of him as "witty," "sweet," "free," "gentle," "friendly." Greene is the only man of Shakespeare's time who is known to have uttered an ill-natured word against him. Ben Jonson had no very high respect for his writings, but his heart was won by the charm of Shakespeare's personality. "I loved the man," he said, "and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any. He was indeed honest, and of an open and free nature, had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions." "Merciful, wonder-making Heaven! what a man was this Shakespeare! Myriad-minded, indeed he was!" (Coleridge).

The town of Stratford is situated in "leafy Warwickshire,"—the middle shire of the Midlands—on the right bank of the Avon, a broad, deep, placid river, winding between "shadowy forests" (to the north) and "wide-skirted meads" (to the south) on its way to join the Severn. In Shakespeare's time the great forest of Arden extended far to the north, and was doubtless a place of enchantment to the youthful poet's soul. The town is visited to-day by pilgrims from every quarter of the globe. The sights shown to strangers include the Birthplace, the Grammar School, the Guild Hall, the foundations (for nothing more is left) of New Place, Anne Hathaway's Cottage, and the beautiful old Church by the river-side. These things recall the scenes of Shakespeare's youth and age with a vividness beyond any biographer's skill, and make a visit to Stratford a red-letter day to every lover of his writings. "Yes, Stratford will help you to understand Shakespeare" (F. J. Furnivall).

THE PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

SIXTEEN of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto editions in his life-time and a seventeenth—*Othello*—in 1622. But it was not till seven years after his death that Shakespeare's plays were collected and published in an authorized form. This was the famous First Folio of 1623, given to the world by two of the dramatist's friends and fellow-actors of former days, John Heminge and Henry Condell, who are both remembered in his will.

In their "Dedication" of the First Folio, Heminge and Condell state that in collecting and publishing Shakespeare's plays they have "done an office to the dead . . . without ambition either of self-profit or fame : only to keep the memory of so worthy a Friend and Fellow alive, as was our Shakespeare." And in their address "To the great Variety of Readers" they write : "It had been a thing, we confess, worthy to have been wished, that the Author himself had lived to have set forth and overseen his own writings." Of Shakespeare they speak as one "who, as he was a happy imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together : and what he thought, he uttered with that easiness, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers."

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The prefatory matter printed at the beginning of the First Folio includes also "The Names of the principal Actors in all these Plays" [Shakespeare heads the list,



and Richard Burbage comes next]; and four sets of "Commendatory Verses," the first written by Ben Jonson and consisting of eighty lines in heroic couplets.¹

The plays in the First Folio are arranged in three groups: (1) Comedies, (2) Histories, and (3) Tragedies; but the editors made no attempt to place them in their chronological order. This task they left for later generations. Early critics, like Dryden, Rowe, etc., having little to guide them but their own predilections, fell into chronological errors that surprise us to-day.

It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the succession of Shakespeare's plays was investigated with the knowledge and industry which the subject demands. This is without doubt one of the most profitable branches of Shakespearian study, because of the light which it sheds upon *the evolution of his mind as an artist*.

If it has not been possible to assign a definite date to every particular play, it has at least been established beyond doubt that *there is such an evolution*, and that plays of the same type belong to the same stage in his career. Working upon this principle, critics have arranged the plays of Shakespeare in successive groups, leaving the order of the plays within the various groups more or less a matter of conjecture.

¹ The whole of this most interesting prefatory matter, which ought to be within reach of all students as it contains the kernel of all that is known about Shakespeare as a professional man, is systematically excluded from the standard editions of his works—not merely from single-volume editions like the *Globe*, and the *Oxford*, but even from ten-volume editions like the *Cambridge* and the *Eversley Shakespeares*.

The following is the usually accepted arrangement of the different periods :—

- (1) Prentice Period, (1590-1593).
- (2) Maturing Period (1594-1600).
- (3) Tragic Period (1601-1607).
- (4) Romantic Period (1608-1613).

The first period has been called, “ In the workshop ” ; the second, “ In the world ” ; the third, “ Out of the depths ” ; and the fourth, “ On the heights.”¹

It would be beyond the scope of this Introduction to do more than indicate the nature of the evidence employed to distinguish between Shakespeare’s earlier and his later work, but the following table may be found useful :

(1) Dates of Quartos, entries of Plays in the Stationers’ Registers, notices of performances at court, Diaries (*e.g.*, Manningham’s and Simon Forman’s), references in contemporary literature, especially the list in Meres’s *Palladis Tamia* (1598).

(2) Allusions in the Plays to contemporary history or to passing events of the day, and passages suggested by or echoing earlier writings.

(3) Language and style. “ *The secret of the metre of Shakespeare is this that the thought constructs the tune, so that reading for the sense will best bring out the rhythm.*”

These words of Emerson apply to Shakespeare’s writings from first to last, yet striking differences are observable between his earlier and his later diction.

¹ See Dowden’s *Shakespeare Primer*, p. 84.

(a) Shakespeare's earliest verses are smooth and regular, the sense ends with the end of the line, rhyme is often found amidst the blanks.

(b) As he grows to maturity, he breaks away from the fetters imposed by the decasyllabic norm, pauses become more frequent, light endings begin to be observed, one line is "run on" to the next (instead of "end-stopped"), double (= "feminine") endings of lines become more common, prose is more frequently substituted for verse.

(c) In Shakespeare's last plays, the tendency in the direction of freedom is still greater, scansion becomes more difficult, weak endings are freely employed, and extra syllables are introduced even in the middle of lines.

Light endings are such words as *am, are, might, should, till, while*, on which the voice scarcely dwells in reading; weak endings are such words as *and, from, in, of, for, or, to, with, at, as, by*, on which the voice dwells in a still slighter degree. These distinctions are Prof. Ingram's.

The following passage from Shakespeare's last play, (*Henry VIII*, 3. 296-104), exhibits most of the peculiarities of his latest style :

This candle burns not clear : 'tis I must snuff it ;
 Then out it goes. What though I know her virtuous
 And well-deserving ? yet I know her for
 A spleeny Lutheran , and not wholesome to
 Our cause, that she should lie i' the bosom of
 Our hard-rul'd king. Again, there is sprung up
 An heretic, an arch one, Cranmer ; one
 Hath crawl'd into the favour of the king,
 And is his oracle.

Observe (1) that the 1st and 2nd lines have feminine endings ; (2) that the 3rd, 4th and 5th have weak endings ;



(3) that the only end-stopped lines are the 1st and 8th. This example is from F. J. Furnivall's Introduction to Gervinus' *Shakespeare Commentaries*.

(4) Development of dramatic art, shown in general handling of the theme, power of characterisation, growing knowledge of life, and deeper moral insight. "The mighty stream of his potentiality is always moving onwards, always expanding, always deepening."

No scheme of chronology can be more tentative. Earlier work was often revised for later presentations. It has become customary to arrange the plays in the following groups, corresponding to the broadly-marked periods in the evolution of Shakespeare's dramatic art already referred to.

(1) *Prentice Period*. Early Histories, founded on Plays by older dramatists, which Shakespeare recast to suit the popular stage. Early Comedies, euphuistic and pedantic in style.

1591.

Love's Labour's Lost.

1 Henry VI.

1592.

Titus Andronicus.

2 and 3 Henry VI.

1593.

The Comedy of Errors.

Two Gentlemen of Verona

(2) *Maturing Period*. The earliest Tragedy, the finest Comedies, the English Histories that came entirely from his pen.

1594.

Romeo and Juliet.

Richard III.

1597.

The Taming of the Shrew.

1 Henry IV.

1595.

Richard II.

Midsummer Night's Dream.

1598.

Much Ado About Nothing.

2 Henry IV.

1596.

Merchant of Venice.

King John.

1599.

Henry V.

The Merry Wives of Windsor

1600.

As You Like It.

Twelfth Night.

(3) *Tragic Period.* A few painful Comedies and all the great Tragedies.

1601.

All's Well that Ends Well.

Julius Caesar.

1604.

Measure for Measure.

Othello.

1602.

Hamlet.

1605.

King Lear.

1603.

Troilus and Cressida.

1606.

Macbeth.

Antony and Cleopatra.

1607.

Coriolanus.

Timon of Athens.

(4) *Romantic Period.* These form a remarkable group by themselves, and can be classed neither as tragedies nor as comedies. The spirit of the country pervades them, and the peasantry sometimes play a leading part in the action.

1608.

Pericles (part only).

1610.

Winter's Tale.

1609.

Cymbeline.

1611.

The Tempest.

1613.

Henry VIII (part only).

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(d) BIOGRAPHY.

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(e) PERIODICALS.

The Shakespeare League Journal, the Organ of London Shakespeare League: Founded the 23rd April, 1902. Objects: (1) to advocate the recognition of Shakespeare's Life-Work in London; (2) to honour Shakespeare as Poet, Dramatist, Actor, and Man of the Theatre; (3) to insist that the stage representation of Shakespeare's plays, without mutilation or distortion of the text, is vital to a full understanding of his work.

THE ELIZABETHAN STAGE.

Much has been written in recent years on the subject of Elizabethan playhouses and the method of acting plays in vogue in Shakespeare's time, and it is of material assistance to the understanding of his plays to keep in mind the kind of stage for which he wrote them. The stage—entirely different from that in a modern theatre—consisted of a platform which projected right into the area of the house. Around were tiers of galleries, upper and lower, like the “circles” in the theatres of to-day.

Players who strode on such a stage as that, having the spectators on three sides of them, must have felt in far more living contact with their public than is possible in our theatres to-day, in which the stage retreats from the auditorium and the actors have the appearance of being cooped up in a room one of the walls of which has been removed.



And the effect must have been as different upon the spectators. Actors to-day, when seen from the body of the theatre, present a series of pictures; but on the Elizabethan stage, where they were visible from so many different angles, they must have given the impression of moving groups of animated statuary.

We read that a curtain, technically known as the "traverse," divided the Elizabethan stage into two parts, an inner and an outer, and that the simple properties of those days were set out upon the inner stage.

(1) When the curtain was drawn aside, the outer and the inner stages became one stage, and the properties on the inner stage gave the setting to the whole. This was a full-stage scene.

(2) When the curtain shut off the inner stage from view, the outer stage, bare and unpropertied, became a stage in itself. This was an outer-stage scene.

Continuity, and therefore rapidity of action, was secured in various ways: (1) by a succession of outer-stage scenes; (2) by a succession of inner-stage scenes without a change of setting; (3) by an alternation of outer and inner-stage scenes.

An important part of the structure was what was known as the balcony. From this elevation, when occasion called for it, the actors spoke to those down below. In our play the balcony is twice at least called into requisition; in the First Act when Brabantio appears above at a window; and in the Last Act, when Othello appears above at a window.

In the Elizabethan theatre the ear was more appealed to than the eye, and the art of clear enunciation was



considered all-important. "Words which often appear to be meaningless in print become instinct with life with the help of voice and action" (William Poel). In Hamlet's Speech to the Players we seem to hear Shakespeare himself speaking from behind his mask, and, in his capacity of stage-manager, instructing the youthful members of his company on "the whole duty of an actor." This famous passage, some of which we reproduce, shows us Shakespeare's dislike of ranting and his love of naturalness and simplicity:—

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue: but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus; but use all gently: for in the very torrent, tempest, and—as I may say—the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness.

Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor: suit the action to the word, the word to the action: with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature; for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

INTRODUCTION TO
OTHELLO, THE MOOR OF VENICE



Wings have we,—and as far as we can go
We may find pleasure : wilderness and wood,
Blank ocean and mere sky, support that mood
Which with the lofty sanctifies the low.
Dreams, books, are each a world ; and books, we know,
Are a substantial world, both pure and good ;
Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,
Our pastime and our happiness will grow.
There find I personal themes, a plenteous store,
Matter wherein right voluble I am,
To which I listen with a ready ear ;
Two shall be named, pre-eminently dear,—
THE GENTLE LADY MARRIED TO THE MOOR,
And heavenly Una with her milk-white Lamb.

WORDSWORTH, *Personal Tale.*



INTRODUCTION TO OTHELLO

EARLIEST REPRESENTATION—EARLIEST EDITIONS

THE earliest stage-representation of *Othello* was given in the banqueting-house at Whitehall on the first of November, 1604. The evidence for this fact is contained in the "Revel Books" of those days, *i.e.*, the account-books of the expenses incurred for the entertainment of Royalty by the Master of the Revels. It has been conjectured that *Othello* was the first new piece by Shakespeare that was acted before the new king.

Though it was one of the most popular of all Shakespeare's plays, *Othello* was not printed till six years after his death, when it appeared in a tiny Quarto edition, sold originally for 6*d.*, though a copy fetched £1,250 at Sotheby's book-sale in April, 1920, the book being now a great rarity among collectors.

The publisher was Thomas Walkley, and his Address to the Reader, containing one of the not too numerous contemporary allusions to Shakespeare, is sufficiently curious to be quoted at length here—

"To set forth a book without an Epistle, were like to the old English proverb, A blue coat without a badge, and the Author being dead, I thought good to take that piece of work upon me: To commend it, I will not, for that which is good, I hope every man will commend, without intreaty: and I am the bolder, because the Author's name is sufficient to vent his work. Thus leaving everyone to the liberty of judgement: I have ventured to print this Play, and leave it to the general censure."

The *Othello* in the Folio Shakespeare (1623), which appeared soon after this Quarto, is an independent text, and contains 160 lines not in the Quarto, among them being the famous passage about the Pontic Sea (3. 3. 453-460).

There are notable discrepancies between the two texts and sometimes the Quarto has the superior reading, but oftener, we think, the Folio. The most striking difference is the presence of a large number of oaths in the Quarto which are either quite omitted or toned down in the Folio. The name of "God" is usually altered to "Heaven" (see p. 281), and expressions like "Sblood," "Zounds," "ud's pity" (p. 250) are cut out altogether. These differences seem to indicate that the Quarto represents the more primitive text, and that it was printed from an old prompter's copy, dating before the passing of the Act of 1605 against profanity on the stage (cp. note on p. 3). The Folio, on the other hand, would appear to be a revised edition of the play—perhaps the acting version that was current in 1623.

A great many perfectly harmless expletives were struck out by the too-zealous Censor—witness the opening line of the play in the two different texts:

Quarto : TUSH, never tell me, I take it much unkindly...

Folio : Never tell me, I take it much unkindly...

The expression "by this hand" (indicating a characteristic gesture of Iago's) occurs about half-a-dozen times in the Quarto but is usually omitted in the Folio. Real obscenity, on the other hand, is not interfered with—there is actually more of it, in the *expurgated* than in the *unexpurgated* text: apparently it did not come within the Censor's province.

SOURCE OF THE PLOT.

The plot of *Othello* (like that of *Measure for Measure*) is traceable to the pen of Giraldi Cinthio, a Sicilian novelist, who in 1565 published his *Hecatomithi* (Hundred Tales).



“Cinthio’s story is a sordid and brutal tale, badly conceived and clumsily told. But the raw material of tragedy is there. The chief characters and the main events of *Othello* are all in Cinthio, awaiting the poet’s hand to redeem, remake, and glorify them. We find there the warlike Moor in the service of Venice, the fair lady, Disdemona [*sic*], who weds him in spite of the opposition of her relatives, the intriguing ensign [Ancient Iago], the ensign’s wife, and the captain [Lieutenant Cassio] against whom the Moor’s suspicions are directed. In general the plot runs along the lines familiar to all. Disdemona accompanies her husband to Cyprus. The ensign, after arousing the Moor to jealousy, confirms his suspicions by bringing him to witness (though not to overhear) a conversation in which the innocent captain is supposed to be speaking of Disdemona’s passion, and finally by exhibiting the handkerchief. At the Moor’s request the ensign undertakes to kill the captain, but only succeeds in wounding him. Shortly thereafter the Moor and the ensign murder Disdemona in her bedchamber.

“Though in the main outline Shakespeare followed his original, he handled it with perfect freedom. He omitted several incidents that he could not utilize, and added a few characters, Brabantio, Roderigo, Montano, and others,—all, as may easily be seen, for well-defined dramatic purposes. He wove the threads of the plot far more closely together than Cinthio, making Iago responsible for Cassio’s disgrace, and Iago’s wife for the final solution of the intrigue, as she had been for its first success. And he quickened the speed of the action until, once the plot is fairly started, it seems to sweep before us in one unbroken



succession of events like Niagara rushing headlong to its plunge into the abyss" (*Tudor Shakespeare, abbr.*).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY.

The "Enveloping Action" of the play is furnished by the wars between the Venetian Republic and the Turkish Empire during the sixteenth century. Though Othello himself is not an historical figure, yet the contest in which he figures as the protagonist brings us into contact with what might have been actual events. Venice was for centuries the bulwark of Europe against the Ottoman power. Everyone is familiar with Wordsworth's sonnet—

Once did She hold the gorgeous East in fee ;
And was the safeguard of the West : the worth
Of Venice did not fall below her birth,
Venice, the eldest Child of Liberty !

The island of Cyprus was the key to the Levant. It passed by right of conquest from the dominion of the Turks to that of the Venetians in 1487. The Turks made many attempts to regain it before it fell into their hands again in 1571. The historical time of the play is 1570—the year before Venice was to lose possession of the island for ever.

"The time of the play may be ascertained from the following circumstances : Selim the Second formed his design against Cyprus in 1569, and took it in 1571. We learn from the play that there was a junction of the Turkish fleet at Rhodes, in order for the invasion of Cyprus ; that it first came sailing to Cyprus, then went to Rhodes, there met another squadron, and then resumed its way to Cyprus [cp. note, p. 35]. These are real historical events which happened when Mustapha, Selim's general, attacked Cyprus in May, 1570, which, therefore, is the true period of this performance" (Reed).

OTHELLO ¹

BY CHARLES LAMB

[Dear Wordsworth—I am answerable for *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Timon*, *Romeo*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, for occasionally a tailpiece or correction of grammar, and all of the spelling. The rest is my sister's. We think *Pericles* of hers the best, and *Othello* of mine; but I hope all have some good. C. Lamb.]

BRABANTIO, the rich senator of Venice, had a fair daughter, the gentle Desdemona. She was sought in marriage by divers suitors, both on account of her many virtuous qualities, and for her rich expectations. But among the suitors of her own clime and complexion, she saw none whom she could affect: for this noble lady, who regarded the mind more than the features of men, with a singularity rather to be admired than imitated, had chosen for the object of her affections a Moor, a black, whom her father loved, and often invited to his house.

Neither is Desdemona to be altogether condemned for the unsuitableness of the person whom she selected for her lover. Except that Othello was black, the noble Moor wanted nothing which might recommend him to the affections of the greatest lady. He was a soldier, and a brave one; and by his conduct in bloody wars against the Turks had risen to the rank of general in the Venetian service, and was esteemed and trusted by the state.

He had been a traveller, and Desdemona (as is the manner of ladies) loved to hear him tell the story of his

¹ From *Tales from Shakespeare*, by Charles and Mary Lamb. Some archaic expressions have been changed into their equivalents in current English.



adventures, which he would run through from his earliest recollection ; the battles, sieges, and encounters, which he had passed through ; the perils he had been exposed to by land and by water ; his hair-breadth escapes, when he had entered a breach, or marched up to the mouth of a cannon ; and how he had been taken prisoner by the insolent enemy, and sold to slavery ; how he conducted himself in that state, and how he escaped : all these accounts, added to the narration of the strange things he had seen in foreign countries, the vast wildernesses and romantic caverns, the quarries, the rocks and mountains, whose heads are in the clouds ; of the savage nations, the cannibals who are man-eaters, and a race of people in Africa whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders : these travellers' stories would so enchain the attention of Desdemona, that if she were called off at any time by household affairs, she would despatch with all haste that business, and return, and with a greedy ear devour Othello's discourse. And once he took advantage of a pliant hour, and drew from her a prayer, that he would tell her the whole story of his life at large, of which she had heard so much, but only by parts : to which he consented, and beguiled her of many a tear, when he spoke of some distressful stroke which his youth had suffered.

His story being done, she gave him for his pains a world of sighs : she swore a pretty oath, that it was all passing strange, and pitiful, wondrous pitiful : she wished (she said) she had not heard it, yet she wished that heaven had made her such a man ; and then she thanked him, and told him, if he had a friend who loved her, he had only to teach him how to tell his story, and that would woo her.



Upon this hint, delivered with not more frankness than modesty, accompanied with a certain bewitching prettiness, and blushes, which Othello could not but understand, he spoke more openly of his love, and in this golden opportunity gained the consent of the generous lady Desdemona privately to marry him.

Neither Othello's colour nor his fortune were such that it could be hoped Brabantio would accept him for a son-in-law. He had left his daughter free; but he did expect that, as the manner of noble Venetian ladies was, she would choose ere long a husband of senatorial rank or expectations; but in this he was deceived; Desdemona loved the Moor, though he was black, and devoted her heart and fortunes to his valiant parts and qualities; so was her heart subdued to an implicit devotion to the man she had selected for a husband, that his very colour, which to all but this discerning lady would have proved an insurmountable objection, was by her esteemed above all the white skins and clear complexions of the young Venetian nobility, her suitors.

Their marriage, which, though privately carried out, could not long be kept a secret, came to the ears of the old man Brabantio, who appeared in a solemn council of the senate, as an accuser of the Moor Othello, who by spells and witchcraft (he maintained) had seduced the affections of the fair Desdemona to marry him without the consent of her father, and against the obligations of hospitality.

At this juncture of time it happened that the state of Venice had immediate need of the services of Othello, news having arrived that the Turks with mighty preparation had fitted out a fleet, which was bending its course to the island



of Cyprus, with intent to regain that strong post from the Venetians, who then held it; in this emergency the state turned its eyes upon Othello, who alone was deemed adequate to conduct the defence of Cyprus against the Turks. So that Othello, now summoned before the senate, stood in their presence at once as a candidate for a great state employment, and as a culprit, charged with offences which by the laws of Venice were made capital.

The age and senatorial character of old Brabantio commanded a most patient hearing from that grave assembly; but the incensed father conducted his accusation with so much intemperance, producing likelihoods and allegations for proofs, that when Othello was called upon for his defence he had only to relate a plain tale of the course of his love; which he did with such an artless eloquence, recounting the whole story of his wooing, as we have related it above, and delivered his speech with so noble a plainness (the evidence of truth), that the duke, who sat as chief judge, could not help confessing that a tale so told would have won his daughter too: and the spells and conjurations which Othello had used in his courtship plainly appeared to have been no more than the honest arts of men in love; and the only witchcraft which he had used, the faculty of telling a soft tale to win a lady's ear.

This statement of Othello was confirmed by the testimony of the lady Desdemona herself, who appeared in court, and professing a duty to her father for life and education, challenged leave of him to profess a yet higher duty to her lord and husband, even so much as her mother had shown in preferring him (Brabantio) above *her* father.



The old senator, unable to maintain his plea, called the Moor to him with many expressions of sorrow, and, as an act of necessity, bestowed upon him his daughter, whom, if he had been free to withhold her (he told him), he would with all his heart have kept from him ; adding, that he was glad at soul that he had no other child, for this behaviour of Desdemona would have taught him to be a tyrant, and hang clogs on *them* for *her* desertion.

This difficulty being got over, Othello, to whom custom had rendered the hardships of a military life as natural as food and rest are to other men, readily undertook the management of the wars in Cyprus : and Desdemona, preferring the honour of her lord (though with danger) before the indulgence of those idle delights in which new-married people usually waste their time, cheerfully consented to his going.

No sooner were Othello and his lady landed in Cyprus, than news arrived that a desperate tempest had dispersed the Turkish fleet, and thus the island was secure from any immediate apprehension of an attack. But the war which Othello was to suffer was now beginning ; and the enemies which malice stirred up against his innocent lady proved in their nature more deadly than strangers or infidels.

Among all the general's friends no one possessed the confidence of Othello more entirely than Cassio. Michael Cassio was a young soldier, a Florentine, gay, amorous, and of pleasing address, favourite qualities with women ; he was handsome and eloquent, and exactly such a person as might alarm the jealousy of a man advanced in years (as Othello in some measure was), who had married a young and beautiful



wife; but Othello was as free from jealousy as he was noble, and as incapable of suspecting as of doing a base action. He had employed this Cassio in his love-affair with Desdemona, and Cassio had been a sort of go-between in his suit: for Othello, fearing that he himself had not those soft parts of conversation which please ladies, and finding these qualities in his friend, would often depute Cassio to go (as he phrased it) a-courting for him: such innocent simplicity being rather an honour than a blemish to the character of the valiant Moor. So that no wonder if, next to Othello himself (but at far distance, as beseems a virtuous wife), the gentle Desdemona loved and trusted Cassio. Nor had the marriage of this couple made any difference in their behaviour to Michael Cassio. He frequented their house, and his free and rattling talk was no unpleasing variety to Othello, who was himself of a more serious temper: for such tempers are observed often to delight in their contraries, as a relief from the oppressive excess of their own: and Desdemona and Cassio would talk and laugh together, as in the days when he went a-courting for his friend.

Othello had lately promoted Cassio to be the lieutenant, a place of trust, and nearest to the general's person. This promotion gave great offence to Iago, an older officer who thought he had a better claim than Cassio, and would often ridicule Cassio as a fellow fit only for the company of ladies and one that knew no more of the art of war, or how to set an army in array for battle, than a girl. Iago hated Cassio, and he hated Othello, as well for favouring Cassio, as for an unjust suspicion, which he had lightly taken-up against Othello, that the Moor was too fond of Iago's wife Emilia.



From these imaginary provocations, the plotting mind of Iago conceived a horrid scheme of revenge, which should involve both Cassio, the Moor, and Desdemona, in one common ruin.

Iago was artful, and had studied human nature deeply, and he knew that of all the torments which afflict the mind of man (and far beyond bodily torture), the pains of jealousy were the most intolerable, and had the sorest sting. If he could succeed in making Othello jealous of Cassio, he thought it would be an exquisite plot of revenge, and might end in the death of Cassio or Othello, or both; he cared not.

The arrival of the general and his lady in Cyprus, coinciding with the news of the dispersion of the enemy's fleet, made a sort of holiday in the island. Everybody gave themselves up to feasting and making merry. Wine flowed in abundance, and cups went round to the health of the black Othello, and his lady the fair Desdemona.

Cassio had the direction of the guard that night, with a charge from Othello to keep the soldiers from excess in drinking, that no brawl might arise, to fright the inhabitants or disgust them with the new-landed forces. That night Iago began his deep-laid plans of mischief: under colour of loyalty and love to the general, he enticed Cassio to make rather too free with the bottle (a great fault in an officer upon guard). Cassio for a time resisted, but he could not long hold out against the honest freedom which Iago knew how to put on, but kept swallowing glass after glass (as Iago still plied him with drink and encouraging songs), and Cassio's tongue ran over in praise of the lady Desdemona, whom he again and again toasted, affirming

that she was a most exquisite lady : until at last the enemy which he put into his mouth stole away his brains ; and upon some provocation given him by a fellow whom Iago had set on, swords were drawn, and Montano, a worthy officer who interfered to appease the dispute, was wounded in the scuffle. The riot now began to be general, and Iago who had set on foot the mischief, was foremost in spreading the alarm, causing the castle-bell to be rung (as if some dangerous mutiny instead of a slight drunken quarrel had arisen) : the alarm-bell ringing awakened Othello, who, dressing in a hurry, and coming to the scene of action, questioned Cassio of the cause. Cassio was now come to himself, the effect of the wine having a little gone off, but was too much ashamed to reply ; and Iago, pretending a great reluctance to accuse Cassio, but, as it were, forced into it by Othello, who insisted on knowing the truth, gave an account of the whole matter (leaving out his own share in it, which Cassio was too intoxicated to remember) in such a manner, as while he seemed to make Cassio's offence less, did indeed make it appear greater than it was. The result was, that Othello, who was a strict observer of discipline, was compelled to take away Cassio's place of lieutenant from him.

Thus did Iago's first artifice succeed completely ; he had now undermined his hated rival, and thrust him out of his place ; but a further use was hereafter to be made of the adventure of this disastrous night.

Cassio, whom this misfortune had entirely sobered, now lamented to his seeming friend Iago that he should have been such a fool as to transform himself into a beast. He was undone, for how could he ask the general for his place

again ! he would tell him he was a drunkard. He despised himself. Iago, affecting to make light of it, said that he or any man living might be drunk upon occasion ; it remained now to make the best of a bad bargain ; the general's wife was now the general, and could do anything with Othello ; that Cassio were best to apply to the lady Desdemona to mediate for him with her lord ; that she was of a frank, obliging disposition, and would readily undertake a good office of this sort, and set Cassio right again in the general's favour ; and then this crack in their love would be made stronger than ever. A good advice of Iago, if it had not been given for wicked purposes, which will after appear.

Cassio did as Iago advised him, and made application to the lady Desdemona, who was easy to be won-over in any honest suit ; and she promised Cassio that she should be his solicitor with her lord, and rather die than give up his cause. This she immediately set about in so earnest and pretty a manner, that Othello, though mortally offended with Cassio, could not put her off. When he pleaded delay, and [urged] that it was too soon to pardon such an offender, she would not be beat back, but insisted that it should be the next night, or the next morning to that at the farthest. Then she showed how penitent and humbled poor Cassio was, and that his offence did not deserve so sharp a check. And when Othello still hung back, "What ! my lord," said she, "that I should have so much to-do to plead for Michael Cassio, that came a-courting for you, and oftentimes, when I have spoken in dispraise of you, has taken your part ! I count this but a little thing to ask of you. When I mean to try your love indeed, I shall ask a weighty



matter." Othello could deny nothing to such a pleader, and only requesting that Desdemona would leave the time to him, promised to receive Michael Cassio again into favour.

It happened that Othello and Iago had entered into the room where Desdemona was, just as Cassio, who had been imploring her intercession, was departing at the opposite door : and Iago, who was full of art, said in a low voice, as if to himself, " I like not that." Othello took no great notice of what he said ; indeed, the conference which immediately took place with his lady put it out of his head ; but he remembered it afterwards. For when Desdemona was gone, Iago, as if for mere satisfaction of his thought, questioned Othello whether Michael Cassio, when Othello was courting his lady, knew of his love. To this the general answering in the affirmative, and adding, that he had gone between them very often during the courtship, Iago knitted his brow, as if he had got fresh light on some terrible matter, and cried, " Indeed ! " This brought into Othello's mind the words which Iago had let fall upon entering the room, on seeing Cassio with Desdemona ; and he began to think that there was some meaning in all this : for he deemed Iago to be a just man, and full of love and honesty, and what in a false knave would be tricks, in him seemed to be the natural workings of an honest mind, big with something too great for utterance : and Othello prayed Iago to speak what he knew, and to give his worst thoughts words. " And what," said Iago, " if some thoughts very vile should have intruded into my breast,—as where is the palace into which foul things do not enter ? " Then Iago went on to say, what a pity it were if any trouble should arise to Othello out of his imperfect

observations; that it would not be for Othello's peace to know his thoughts; that people's good names were not to be taken away for slight suspicions; and when Othello's curiosity was raised almost to distraction with these hints and scattered words, Iago, as if in earnest care for Othello's peace of mind, besought him to beware of jealousy: with such art did this villain raise suspicions in the unguarded Othello, by the very caution which he pretended to give him against suspicion. "I know," said Othello, "that my wife is fair, loves company and feasting, is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well; but where virtue is, these qualities are virtuous. I must have proof before I think her dishonest." Then Iago, as if glad that Othello was slow to believe ill of his lady, frankly declared that he had no proof, but begged Othello to observe her behaviour well when Cassio was by; not to be jealous nor too secure neither, for that he (Iago) knew the dispositions of the Italian ladies, his countrywomen, better than Othello could do; and that in Venice the wives let heaven see many pranks they dared not show their husbands. Then he artfully insinuated that Desdemona deceived her father in marrying with Othello, and carried it so secretly, that the poor old man thought that witchcraft had been used. Othello was much moved with his argument, which brought the matter home to him, for if she had deceived her father, why might she not deceive her husband?

Iago begged pardon for having moved him; but Othello, assuming an indifference, while he was really shaken with inward grief at Iago's words, begged him to go on, which Iago did with many apologies, as if

unwilling to produce anything against Cassio, whom he called his friend: he then came strongly to the point, and reminded Othello how Desdemona had refused many suitable matches of her own clime and complexion, and had married him, a Moor, which appeared unnatural in her, and proved her to have a head-strong will; and when her better judgment returned, how probable it was that she should begin to compare Othello with the fine forms and clear white complexions of the young Italians her countrymen. He concluded with advising Othello to put off his reconciliation with Cassio a little longer, and in the meanwhile to note with what earnestness Desdemona should intercede in his behalf; for much would be seen in that. So mischievously did this artful villain lay his plots to turn the gentle qualities of this innocent lady into her destruction, and make a net for her out of her goodness to entrap her: first setting Cassio on to entreat her mediation, and then, out of that very mediation, contriving stratagems for her ruin.

The conference ended with Iago's begging Othello to account his wife innocent until he had more decisive proof; and Othello promised to be patient; but from that moment the deceived Othello never tasted content of mind. Neither poppy nor the juice of mandragora, nor all the sleeping potions in the world, could ever again restore to him that sweet rest, which he had enjoyed but yesterday. His occupation sickened upon him. He no longer took delight in arms. His heart, that used to be roused at the sight of troops, and banners, and battle-array, and would stir and leap at the sound of a drum, or a trumpet, or a neighing war-horse, seemed to have lost all that pride



and ambition which are a soldier's virtue; and his military ardour and all his old joys forsook him. Sometimes he thought his wife honest, and at other times he thought her not so; sometimes he thought Iago just, and at other times he thought him not so; then he would wish that he had never known of it; he was not the worse for her loving Cassio, so long as he knew it not. Torn to pieces with these distracting thoughts, he once laid hold of Iago's throat, and demanded proof of Desdemona's guilt, or threatened instant death for his having be-lied her. Iago, feigning indignation that his honesty should be taken for a vice, asked Othello if he had not sometimes seen a handkerchief spotted with strawberries in his wife's hand. Othello answered, that he had given her such a one, and that it was his first gift. "That same handkerchief," said Iago, "did I see Michael Cassio this day wipe his face with." "If it be as you say," said Othello, "I will not rest till a wide revenge swallow them up; and first for a token of your fidelity, I expect that Cassio shall be put to death within three days; and for that fair devil (meaning his lady), I will withdraw and devise some swift means of death for her."

Trifles light as air are to the jealous proofs as strong as holy writ. A handkerchief of his wife's seen in Cassio's hand was motive enough to the deluded Othello to pass sentence of death upon them both, without once inquiring how Cassio came by it. Desdemona had never given such a present to Cassio, nor would this constant lady have wronged her lord with doing so naughty a thing as giving his presents to another man; both Cassio and Desdemona were innocent of any offence against Othello: but the



wicked Iago, whose spirits never slept when there was villainy to be contrived, had made his wife (a good but a weak woman) steal his handkerchief from Desdemona under pretence of getting the work copied, but in reality to drop it in Cassio's way, where he might find it, and give a handle to Iago's suggestion that it was Desdemona's present.

Othello, soon after meeting his wife, pretended that he had a headache (as he might indeed with truth), and desired her to lend him her handkerchief to hold to his temples.¹ She did so. "Not this," said Othello, "but the handkerchief that I gave you." Desdemona had it not about her (for indeed it was stolen, as we have related). "How?" said Othello, "this is a fault indeed. That handkerchief an Egyptian woman gave to my mother; the woman was a witch and could read people's thoughts: she told my mother that while she kept it, it would make her amiable, and my father would love her; but that if she lost it or gave it away, my father's fancy would turn, and he would loath her as much as he had loved her. She dying gave it to me, and bade me, if I ever married, to give it to my wife. I did so; take heed of it. Make it a darling as precious as your eye." "Is it possible?" said the frightened lady. "'Tis true"; continued Othello; "it is magical handkerchief; a sibyl, that had lived in the world two hundred years, in a fit of prophetic fury worked it; the silkworms that furnished the silk were hallowed, and it was dyed in a mummy of maidens' hearts conserved." Desdemona hearing the wondrous virtues of the handkerchief,

¹ For conciseness Lamb here weaves together two different incidents in the play.

was ready to die with fear, for she plainly perceived she had lost it; and with it, she feared, the affections of her husband. Then Othello started, and looked as if he were going to do some rash thing, and still he demanded the handkerchief, which when she could not produce, she tried to divert her husband from too serious thoughts, and cheerfully told him she saw all his talk about the handkerchief was only to put her off from her suit about Michael Cassio, whom she went on to praise (as Iago had foretold), till Othello in perfect distraction burst out of the room; and then Desdemona, though unwillingly, began to suspect that her lord was jealous.

What cause she could have ministered to him she knew not, and then she accused herself for accusing the noble Othello, and thought, to be sure, that some untoward news from Venice, or some state troubles had puddled his spirits, and made his temper not so sweet as formerly. And she said, "Men are not gods, and we must not look for that observance from them when they are married, which they show us on the bridal day." And she took herself severely to task for so unkindly judging of his unkindness.

Again Othello and Desdemona met, and he accused her more plainly of being unfaithful and of loving another man, but he did not name whom; and Othello wept, and Desdemona said, "Alas! the heavy day! why do you weep?" And Othello told her he could have borne all sorts of evils with fortitude—poverty, and disease, and disgrace; but her infidelity had broken his heart: and he called her a weed, that looked so fair, and smelled so sweet, that the sense ached at it; and wished she had never been born. And when he had left her, this innocent lady was so

stupefied with wonder at her lord's untrue suspicion of her, that a weight-like sleep came over her, and she only desired her attendant to make her bed, and to lay her wedding-sheets upon it, saying that when people teach their babes, they do it by gentle means and easy tasks, and Othello might have chid her so; for in good faith she was but a child when she was chidden. And this was all the complaint which this gentle lady made.

Desdemona being retired to bed, expecting that her lord would follow her, soon fell into a slumber, the effect of her troubled spirits. Soon Othello entered the chamber, full of the black purpose which he had meditated of putting his lady to death. But when he saw her asleep, he thought he would not shed her blood, nor scar that white skin of hers, more white than alabaster. But he was resolved she should die; else (as he said) she would live to betray more men, as she had done him. Then he kissed her for the last time (as he said), and that kiss was so sweet, that he must needs kiss her again: and he wept, but he said they were cruel tears.

Desdemona was awakened with his kisses, and she looked upon Othello, and she saw him gnaw his under-lip, and roll his eyes, and she knew he was always fatal when he looked so; and he bade her prepare for death, and to say her prayers, for he would not kill her soul. And this innocent wife, as she lay at his mercy, begged for compassion, and to know her fault, and then he named Cassio, and the handkerchief which (he said) she had given him; and as the guiltless lady was proceeding to clear herself, he suddenly would hear no more, but covering her up in the bed-clothes, stifled her till she died.

In this instant of time Cassio was brought into the house wounded and bleeding. Iago had set-on one of his creatures to assassinate him ; but the fellow not succeeding in his attempt to kill Cassio (whom he wounded, but not mortally), and being himself killed by Iago to prevent discovery, in his pockets were found certain letters, which made the guilt of Iago and the innocence of Cassio clear beyond all doubt ; and Cassio now came to beg pardon of Othello, and to ask wherein he had so offended him that he had employed Iago to murder him.

This discovery was a thunder-stroke to Othello, who now plainly saw that he was no better than a murderer, and that his wife (poor innocent lady) had been ever faithful to him ; the extreme anguish of which discovery making life insupportable, he fell upon his sword, and throwing himself upon the body of his dear injured lady, expired.

These rash acts raised much passion of horror and amazement in the bystanders, for Othello had borne a fair reputation, and till he was wrought upon by the arts of a villain, which his own noble nature never gave him leave to suspect, he was a loving and a doting husband. He had loved not wisely, but too well ; and his manly eyes (when he learned his mistake), though not used to weep on every small occasion, dropped tears as fast as the Arabian trees their gums. And when he was dead all his former merits and his valiant acts were remembered. Nothing now remained for his successor but to put the utmost censure of the law in force against Iago, who was executed with strict tortures ; and to send word to the state of Venice of the lamentable death of their renowned general.

APPRECIATIONS

(a) BY THOMAS CAMPBELL

The tragedy of *Othello* has evident marks of its plot and incidents having been largely borrowed from Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*. Dunlop, in his *History of Fiction* says that the characters of Desdemona, Iago, and Cassio, are taken from Cinthio with *scarcely a shade of difference*. As to the Cassio of Shakespeare, I shall waive the trouble of inquiring how far he is like or unlike his alleged prototype, the Cypriot Captain : but the character of Desdemona is not taken from Cinthio ; the Desdemona of the Italian novel degrades her husband by the accusation, "*that Moors were naturally moved to anger and a thirst for revenge by every trifling vexation*" ; she is the same in sex, honesty, and circumstances, but she is not the gentle Desdemona of Shakespeare : our poet's heroine, instead of being borrowed from Cinthio, with scarcely a shade of difference, *is not borrowed at all*.

The same thing may be said of Iago ; the villain of the novel has his mainspring motive in his conjugal suspicion of the Moor having had intimacy with his wife. Shakespeare has hinted at such a circumstance when he makes Iago say, that there was a rumour of Othello having been too intimate with his wife. But the villain shows, by his own expressions, that he has no true faith in the scandal. His hatred to Othello is wholly founded in official disappointment ; and neither towards the crisis, nor amidst it, do we ever dream of Iago having been actuated by so pardonable a motive as conjugal jealousy. Besides,



the cunning and intellect of the poet's and novelist's villain, are different beyond all comparison. Between the Moor of Cinthio and of Shakespeare, it was still more useless to institute any comparison: the former gets his wife killed by beating her with a bag of sand, and tries to save himself from suspicion by breaking down a beam in the ceiling, placed as if it had fallen by accident. In the novel, the Moor is arrested, carried to Venice, put to the rack, and afterwards assassinated: this is not Shakespeare's Moor of Venice!

Some allege that Iago is too villainous to be a natural character, but those allegers are simpleton judges of human nature: Fletcher of Saltoun has said that there is many a brave soldier who never wore a sword; in like manner, there is many an Iago in the world who never committed murder. Iago's "learned spirit" and exquisite intellect, happily ending in his own destruction, were as requisite for the moral of the piece as for the sustaining of Othello's high character; for we should have despised the Moor, if he had been deceived by a less consummate villain than "honest Iago." The latter is a true character, and the philosophical truth of this tragedy makes it terrible to peruse, in spite of its beautiful poetry. Why has Aristotle said that tragedy purifies the passions? for our last wish and hope in reading *Othello* is that the villain Iago may be well tortured.

This drama, by itself, would have immortalized any poet; then what are we to think of Shakespeare, when we may hesitate to pronounce it to be best of his plays! Certainly, however, it has no superior in his own theatre,



and no rival in any other. The Moor is at once one of the most complex and astonishing, and yet most intelligible pictures, that fiction ever portrayed of human character. His grandeur of soul is natural, and we admire it; his gentleness is equally natural, and we love him for it; his appearance we cannot but conceive to be majestic, and his physiognomy benevolent. The Indian prince, RAM MOHUN ROY, who delighted all hearts in London a few years ago, and who died to our sorrow, was the only living being I ever saw who came up to my conception of Othello's appearance. But the Moor had been bred a barbarian, and though his bland nature and intercourse with the more civilised world had long warred against and conquered the half-natural habits of barbarism, yet those habits, at last, broke out, and prevailed in the moments of his jealousy. He is not a jealous man by nature, but, being once made jealous, he reverts to savageness, and becomes as terrible as he had before been tender. This contrast in his conduct, however, is not an Ovidian metamorphosis, but a transition so probably managed as to seem unavoidable; yet, the naturalness of the change prevents neither our terror nor pity: on the contrary, the sweetness of his character before its fall, is the smoothness of the stream before its cataract; and his bland dispositions, heretofore displayed, appear, like a rich autumnal day, contrasted with the thunder-storm of its evening.

The terrors of the storm are also made more striking to our imagination by the gentleness of the victim on which they fall—Desdemona. Had one symptom of an angry spirit appeared in that lovely martyr, our sympathy



APPRECIATIONS

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with her would have been endangered : but Shakespeare knew better.

(b) BY MRS. JAMESON.¹

The love of Desdemona for Othello appears at first such a violation of all probabilities that her father at once imputes it to magic, "to spells and mixtures powerful o'er the blood."

She, in spite of nature,
Of years, of country, credit, every thing,
To fall in love with what she fear'd to look on !

And the devilish malignity of Iago, whose coarse mind cannot conceive an affection founded purely in sentiment, derives from her love itself a strong argument against her.

Ay, there's the point, as to be bold with you,
Not to affect many proposed matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
Whereto, we see, in all things nature tends, etc.

Notwithstanding this disparity of age, character, country, complexion, we, who are admitted into the secret, see her love rise naturally and necessarily out of the leading propensities of her nature.

At the period of the story a spirit of wild adventure had seized all Europe. The discovery of both Indies was yet recent ; over the shores of the western hemisphere still fable and mystery hung, with all their dim enchantments, visionary terrors, and golden promises ! perilous expeditions and distant voyages were every day undertaken from hope of plunder, or mere love of enterprise ; and from these the adventurers returned with tales of "antres vast and deserts wild—of cannibals that did each other eat—of Anthropophagi, and men whose heads did grow beneath

¹ *Characteristics of Women ; moral, poetical, and historical.*



their shoulders." With just such stories did Raleigh and Clifford, and their followers, return from the New World : and thus by their splendid or fearful exaggerations, which the imperfect knowledge of those times could not refute, was the passion for the romantic and marvellous nourished at home, particularly among the women. A cavalier of those days had no nearer, no surer way to his mistress's heart, than by entertaining her with these wondrous narratives. What was a general feature of his time, Shakespeare seized and adapted to his purpose with the most exquisite felicity of effect. Desdemona, leaving her household cares in haste, to hang breathless on Othello's tales, was doubtless a picture from the life ; and her inexperience and her quick imagination lend it an added propriety : then her compassionate disposition is interested by all the disastrous chances, hair-breadth 'scapes, and moving accidents by flood and field, of which he has to tell ; and her exceeding gentleness and timidity, and her domestic turn of mind, render her more easily captivated by the military renown, the valour, and lofty bearing of the noble Moor—

And to his honours and his valiant parts
Does she her soul and fortunes consecrate.

The confession and the excuse for her love are well placed in the mouth of Desdemona, while the history of the rise of that love, and of his course of wooing, is, with the most graceful propriety, as far as she is concerned, spoken by Othello, and in her absence. The last two lines summing up the whole—

She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd,
And I lov'd her that she did pity them—

comprise whole volumes of sentiment and metaphysics.



Desdemona displays at times a transient energy, arising from the power of affection, but gentleness gives the prevailing tone to the character—gentleness in its excess—gentleness verging on passiveness—gentleness, which not only cannot resent, but cannot resist.

Othello. And then, of so gentle a condition !

Iago. Ay, too gentle.

Othello. Nay, that's certain.

Here the exceeding softness of Desdemona's temper is turned against her by Iago, so that it suddenly strikes Othello in a new point of view, as the inability to resist temptation ; but to us who perceive the character as a whole, this extreme gentleness of nature is yet delineated with such exceeding refinement that the effect never approaches to feebleness. It is true that *once* her extreme timidity leads her in a moment of confusion and terror to prevaricate about the fatal handkerchief. This handkerchief, in the original story of Cinthio, is merely one of those embroidered handkerchiefs which were as fashionable in Shakespeare's time as in our own ; but the minute description of it as "*lavorato alla moresca sottilissimamente*,"¹ suggested to the poetical fancy of Shakespeare one of the most exquisite and characteristic passages in the whole play. Othello makes poor Desdemona believe that the handkerchief was a talisman :

There's magic in the web of it.

A sibyl, that had number'd in the world

The sun to make two hundred compasses,

In her prophetic fury sew'd the work ;

The worms were hallow'd that did breed the silk ;

¹ Which, being interpreted into modern English, means, I believe, nothing more than that the pattern was what we now call *arabesque*.

OTHELLO

And it was dyed in mummy, which the skilful
Conserv'd of maidens' hearts.

Desdemona, whose soft credulity, whose turn for the marvellous, whose susceptible imagination, had first directed her thoughts and affections to Othello, is precisely the woman to be frightened out of her senses by such a tale as this, and betrayed by her fears into a momentary tergiversation. It is most natural in such a being, and shows us that even in the sweetest natures there can be no completeness and consistency without moral energy.

When Othello first outrages her in a manner which appears inexplicable, she seeks and finds excuses for him. She is so innocent that not only she cannot believe herself suspected, but she cannot conceive the existence of guilt in others.

Something, sure, of state,
Either from Venice, or some unhatch'd practice
Made demonstrable here in Cyprus to him,
Hath puddled his clear spirit.

'Tis even so—

Nay, we must think, men are not gods,
Nor of them look for such observances
As fit the bridal.

And when the direct accusation of crime is flung on her in the vilest terms, it does not anger but stun her, as if it transfixed her whole being; she attempts no reply, no defence; and reproach or resistance never enters her thought.

Good friend, go to him—for by this light of heaven
I know not how I lost him: here I kneel:—
If e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love,
Either in discourse of thought or actual deed;
Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense,

Delighted them in any other form :
Or that I do not yet, and ever did,
And ever will, though he do shake me off
To beggarly divorcement, love him dearly,
Comfort forswear me ! Unkindness may do much,
And his unkindness may defeat my life,
But never taint my love.

And there is one stroke of consummate delicacy, surprising, when we remember the latitude of expression prevailing in Shakespeare's time, and which he allowed to his other women generally : she says, on recovering from her stupefaction—

Am I that name, Iago ?

Iago. What name, sweet lady ?

Desdemona. That which she says my lord did say I was.

So completely did Shakespeare enter into the angelic refinement of the character.

Endued with that temper which is the origin of superstition in love as in religion—which, in fact, makes love itself a religion—she not only does not utter an upbraiding, but nothing that Othello does or says, no outrage, no injustice, can tear away the charm with which her imagination had invested him, or impair her faith in his honour ; “ Would you had never seen him ! ” exclaims Emilia.

Desdemona. So would not I !—my love doth so approve him,
That even his stubbornness, his checks and frowns
Have grace and favour in them.

There is another peculiarity, which, in reading the play of *Othello*, we rather feel than perceive : through the whole of the dialogue appropriated to Desdemona there is not one general observation. Words are with her the vehicle of sentiment, and never of reflection ; so that I cannot find throughout a sentence of general application.

The same remark applies to Miranda ; and to no other female character of any importance or interest—not even to Ophelia.

The rest of what I wished to say of Desdemona has been anticipated by an anonymous critic, and so beautifully, so justly, so eloquently expressed, that I with pleasure erase my own page, to make room for his.

“ All that is below *tragedy* in the passion of love is taken away at once, by the awful character of Othello ; for such he seems to us to be designed to be. His love, as long as it is happy, is perfectly calm and serene—the protecting tenderness of a husband. It is not till it is disordered that it appears as a passion : then is shown a power in contention with itself—a mighty being struck with death, and bringing up from all the depths of life convulsions and agonies. It is no exhibition of the power of the passion of love, but of the passion of life, vitally wounded, and self-overmastering. If Desdemona had been really guilty, the greatness would have been destroyed because his love would have been unworthy, false. But she is good, and his love is most perfect, just, and good. That a man should place his perfect love on a wretched thing, is miserably debasing, and shocking to thought ; but that loving perfectly and well, he should by hellish human circumvention be brought to distrust and dread, and abjure his own perfect love, is most mournful indeed—it is the infirmity of our good nature wrestling in vain with the strong powers of evil. Moreover, he would, had Desdemona been false, have been the mere victim of fate ; whereas he is now in a manner his own victim. His happy love was heroic tenderness ; his injured love is terrible passion ; and disordered power,



engendered within itself to its own destruction, is the height of all tragedy.

“The character of *Othello* is perhaps the most greatly drawn, the most heroic of any in Shakespeare’s plays; but it is, perhaps, that one also of which his reader last acquires the intelligence. The intellectual and warlike energy of his mind—his tenderness of affection—his loftiness of spirit—his frank, generous magnanimity—impetuosity, like a thunderbolt—and that dark, fierce flood of boiling passion, polluting even *his* imagination—compose a character entirely original, most difficult to delineate, but perfectly delineated.”

Emilia in this play is a perfect portrait from common life, a masterpiece in the Flemish style; and though not necessary as a contrast, it cannot be but that the thorough vulgarity, the loose principles of this plebeian woman, united to a high degree of spirit, energetic feeling, strong sense, and low cunning, serve to place in brighter relief the exquisite refinement, the moral grace, the unblemished truth, and the soft submission of Desdemona.

(c) BY EDWARD DOWDEN¹

The tragedy of *Othello* is the tragedy of a free and lordly creature taken in the toils, and writhing to death. In one of his sonnets Shakespeare has spoken of

Some fierce thing replete with too much rage,
Whose strength’s abundance weakens his own heart.

Such a fierce thing, made weak by his very strength, is *Othello*. There is a barbaresque grandeur and simplicity

¹ *Shakespeare : a Critical Study of his Mind and Art.*

about the movements of his soul. He sees things with a large and generous eye, not prying into the curious or the occult. He wears about him the ornament of strange experience: memories of antres vast, and desert idle, rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven, memories of "disastrous chances, of moving accidents by flood and field." There is something of grand innocence in his loyalty to Venice. Othello, a stranger, with tawny skin and fierce traditions in his blood, is fascinated by the grave senate, the nobly ordered life (possessing a certain rich colouring of its own), and the astute intelligence of the City of the Sea.

With this loyalty to Venice, there is also an instinctive turning towards the barbaric glory which he has surrendered. He is the child of royal ancestry: "I fetch my life and being from men of royal siege." All the more joyous on this account it is to devote himself to the service of the State....

The nature of Othello is free and open; he looks on men with a gaze too large and royal to suspect them of malignity and fraud; he is a man "not easily jealous:"

My noble Moor

Is true of mind, and made of no such baseness

As jealous creatures are.

He has, however, a sense of his own inefficiency in dealing with the complex and subtle conditions of life in his adopted country. Where all is plain and broad, he relies upon his own judgment and energy. He is a master of simple, commanding action. When, upon the night of Desdemona's departure from her father's house, Brabantio



and the officers with torches and weapons meet him and a tumult seems inevitable, Othello subdues it with the untroubled, large validity of his will :

Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.

But for curious inquiry into complex facts he has no faculty ; he loses his bearings ; "being wrought upon," he is "perplexed in the extreme." Then, too, his hot Mauritanian blood mounts quickly to the point of boiling. If he be infected, the poison hurries through his veins, and he rages in his agony.

Here upon the one side is material for a future catastrophe. And on the other there is Desdemona's timidity. When she could stand by Othello's side, Desdemona was able to confront her father, and, in presence of the Duke and magnificoes, declare that she would not return to the home she had abandoned. But during Othello's courtship Desdemona had shrunk from any speech upon this matter with Brabantio, and by innocent reserves and little dissemblings had kept him in ignorance of this great event in her history.¹ The Moor had moved her imagination by his strange nobility, his exotic grandeur. But how if afterwards her imagination be excited by some strange terror about her husband ? The handkerchief she has lost becomes terrible to her, when Othello, with oriental rapture into the marvellous, describes its virtues :

¹ A circumstance which Iago afterwards turns to account against the peace of Othello's mind (3. 3. 206 ff.) :

She did deceive her father marrying you ;
And when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks,
She lov'd them most.

Othello. And so she did.



There's magic in the web of it :
 A sibyl, that had number'd in the world
 The sun to course two hundred compasses,
 In her prophetic fury sew'd the work ;
 The worms were hallow'd that did breed the silk ;
 And it was dyed in mummy which the skilful
 Conserv'd of maidens' hearts.

For Desdemona, with her smooth, intelligible girl's life in Venice, having at its largest its little pathetic romance of her maid Barbara, with her song of "Willow," here flowed-in romance too stupendous, too torrid and alien, to be other than dreadful. Shall we wonder that in her disturbance of mind she trembles to declare to her husband that this talisman could not be found ? Underneath the momentary, superficial falsehood remains the constancy and fidelity of her heart ; through alarm and shock and surprise and awful alteration of the world, her heart never swerves from loyalty to her husband. If *she* had deceived Brabantio, as in his anger he declares, and if in this matter of the handkerchief she had faltered from the truth, Desdemona atones for these unveracities by one more falsehood, the sacred lie which is murmured by her lips as they grow forever silent :

Emilia. O, who hath done this deed ?

Desdemona. Nobody ; I myself ; farewell ;

Commend me to my kind lord ; O, farewell !

If the same unknowable force which manifests itself through man manifests itself likewise through the animal world, we might suppose that there were some special affinities between the soul of Othello and the LION of his ancestral desert. Assuredly the same malignant power that lurks in the eye and that fills with venom the fang of the

SERPENT would seem to have brought into existence Iago. "It is the strength of the *base element* that is so dreadful in the serpent; it is the very omnipotence of the earth. It scarcely breathes with its one lung (the other shrivelled and abortive); it is passive to the sun and shade, and is cold or hot like a stone; yet 'it can outclimb the monkey, outswim the fish, outleap the zebra, outwrestle the athlete, and crush the tiger.' It is a divine hieroglyph of the demoniac power of the earth—of the entire earthly nature."¹ Such is the serpent Iago.

In the last scene of the play Othello calls on Cassio (for he cannot himself approach the horror) to interrogate Iago respecting the motives of his malignant crime—

Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil
Why he hath thus ensnar'd my soul and body?

And Iago forecloses all inquiry with the words—they are the last words that he utters—

Demand me nothing; what you know you know;
From this time forth I never will speak word.

Shakespeare would have us believe that as there is a passion of goodness with no motive but goodness itself, so there is also a dreadful capacity in the soul for devotion to evil independently of motives, or out of all proportion to such motives as may exist. Iago is the absolute infidel; for he is devoid of all faith in beauty and in virtue.

Together with everything beautiful, everything noble, there inevitably exists a gross element of the earth. It is upon this gross element alone that Iago battens, and he can discover it everywhere by denying and dismissing

¹ Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air*. The words quoted by Mr. Ruskin are those of Mr. Richard Owen.

all that transforms, purifies, and ennobles it. Othello,
with his heroic simplicity and royalty of soul,

will as tenderly be led by the nose

As asses are.

Cassio, who is full of chivalric enthusiasm for his great leader and the beautiful bride whom he has won, is to Iago "a knave very voluble; no further conscionable than in putting on the mere form of civil and humane feeling for the better compassing of his salt and most hidden loose affection." "Desdemona," exclaims Roderigo, is "full of most blessed condition."

Iago. Blessed fig's end! the wine she drinks is made of grapes; if she had been blessed she would never have loved the Moor. Blessed pudding! Didst thou not see her paddle with the palm of his hand? Didst not mark that?

The Moor has inflamed her imagination with "bragging and telling her fantastical lies." Love "is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will." Virtue is "a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus and thus." "Oh, I have lost my reputation!" Cassio cries, "I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation!"

Iago. As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound.

All this is the earthiness of the serpent; the dull eye which quickens only to fascinate and to strike; the muddy skin, discoloured with foul blotches; and the dust, which is the serpent's meat. This cold, malignant power, passionless and intellectually sensual—the soul itself having become more animal than the body can ever be—is incarnated in the person of a man still young. Iago has reached the age of twenty-eight. And he is a



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merry knave. While enticing Cassio to his ruin he entertains the company with clattering song :

And let me the canakin clink, clink !

And let me the canakin clink !

It is the grin of a death's head, the mirth of a ghoul.

Since Coleridge made the remark, all critics of *Othello* are constrained to repeat after him that the passion of the Moor is not altogether jealousy—it is rather the agony of being compelled to hate that which he supremely loved :

Excellent wretch ! Perdition catch my soul

But I do love thee, and when I love thee not,

Chaos is come again.

It is with an agonized sense of justice that he destroys the creature who is dearest to him in the world, knowing certainly that with hers his own true life must cease. Nay, it is not with the cessation of Desdemona's breath that the life of Othello ends ; he is unable to survive the loss of faith in her perfect purity. All that had been glorious becomes remote and impossible for him if Desdemona be false. We hear the great childlike sob of Othello's soul :

Oh, now for ever

Farewell the tranquil mind ! farewell content !

Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars

That make ambition virtue !

From the first suggestion of suspicion by his ensnarer, Othello is impatient for assurance, and finds suspense intolerable. Why ? Not surely because he is eager to convict his wife of infidelity ; but rather because he will not allow his passionate desire to believe her pure to abuse him, and retain him in a fool's paradise, while a great agony may possibly remain before him.



Of the tragic story what is the final issue? The central point of its spiritual import lies in the contrast between Iago and his victim. Iago, with keen intellectual faculties and manifold culture in Italian vice, lives and thrives after his fashion in a world from which all virtue and all beauty are absent. Othello, with his barbaric innocence and regal magnificence of soul, must cease to live the moment he ceases to retain faith in the purity and goodness which were to him the highest and most real things upon earth. Or if he live, life must become to him a cruel agony. Shakespeare compels us to acknowledge that self-slaughter is a rapturous energy—that such prolonged agony is joy in comparison with the earthly life-in-death of such a soul as that of Iago. The noble nature is taken in the toils because it is noble. Iago suspects his wife of every baseness, but the suspicion has no other effect than to intensify his malignity. Iago could not be captured and constrained to heroic suffering and rage. The shame of every being who bears the name of woman is credible to Iago, and yet he can grate from his throat the jarring music :

And let me the canakin cliuk, clink !

And let me the canakin clink !

There is, therefore, Shakespeare would have us understand, something more inimical to humanity than suffering—namely, an incapacity for noble pain. To die as Othello dies is indeed grievous. But to live as Iago lives, devouring the dust and stinging—this is more appalling.

Such is the spiritual motive that controls the tragedy. And the validity of this truth is demonstrable to every sound conscience. No supernatural authority needs to

be summoned to bear witness to this reality of human life. It is a portion of the ascertained fact of human nature, and of this our mortal existence. We look upon "the tragic loading of the bed," and we see Iago in presence of the ruin he has wrought. We are not compelled to seek for any resolution of these apparent discords in any aged life to come. That may also be; we shall accept it, if it be. But looking sternly and strictly at what is now actual and present to our sight, we yet rise above despair. Desdemona's adherence to her husband and to love survived the ultimate trial. Othello dies "upon a kiss." He perceives his own calamitous error, and he recognizes Desdemona pure and loyal as she was. Goodness is justified of her child. It is evil which suffers defeat. It is Iago whose whole existence has been most blind, purposeless, and miserable—a struggle against the virtuous powers of the world, by which at last he stands convicted and condemned.

(d) BY SIR WALTER RALEIGH.¹

Othello is in many ways Shakespeare's supreme achievement,—in this among others, that he gives tragic dignity to a squalid story of crime by heightening the characters and making all the events inevitable. Othello suffers for his very virtues, and the noblest qualities of his mind are made the instruments of his crucifixion. The story of Othello involved false suspicions, entertained by Othello on the testimony of slander, against his

¹ *Shakespeare*. In the English Men of Letters series. The student is recommended to read in their proper setting the extracts here pieced together from different parts of the book.



young and innocent wife, who had left her home and her country to follow him. If these suspicions grew in the normal fashion, and were nurtured by jealousy, there would be no tragedy, only another *Winter's Tale*. The moralists have been eager to lay the blame of these events on Othello, or Desdemona, or both; but the whole meaning of the play would vanish if they were successful. Shakespeare is too strong for them; they cannot make headway against his command of our sympathies. In Othello he portrayed a man of a high and passionate nature, ready in action, generous in thought. Othello had lived all his life by faith, not by sight. He cannot observe and interpret trifles; his way has been to brush them aside and ignore them. He is impatient of all that is subtle and devious, as if it were a dishonour. Jealousy and suspicion, as Desdemona knows, are foreign to his nature; he credits others freely with all his own noblest qualities. He hates even the show of concealment; when Iago urges him to retire to escape the search-party of Brabantio, he replies:

Oth. Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.

Good Signior, you shall more command with years

Than with your weapons.

If he were less credulous, more cautious and alert and observant, he would be a lesser man than he is, and less worthy of our love.

Everything that follows, up to the crisis of the play, helps to raise Othello to the top of admiration, and to fix him in the affections of the reader. Scene follows scene, and in every one of them, it might be said, Shakespeare is making his task more hopeless. How is he to



fill out the story, and yet save our sympathies for Othello? The effort must be heroic and it is. He invents Iago. The greatness of Iago may be measured by this, that Othello never loses our sympathy. By slow and legitimate means, never extravagant, circumstance is added to circumstance, until a net is woven to take Othello in its toils. But circumstance is not his undoing. Left to himself, even when the toils were closing in upon him, Othello would have rent them asunder, and shaken them off. When he grows impatient, and seems likely to break free, Iago is at hand, to keep him still, and compel him to think. On matters like these Othello cannot think; he is accustomed to impulse, instinct, and action; these tedious processes of arguing on dishonour are torture to him; and when he tries to think, he thinks wrong. His own account of himself is true:

A man not easily jealous, but being wrought
Perplex'd in the extreme.

There is not another of Shakespeare's plays which is so white-hot with imagination, so free from doubtful or extraneous matter, and so perfectly welded, as *Othello*.

His unquestioning faith in Desdemona is his life—what if faith fail him? The temptation attacks him on his blind side. He knows nothing of those dark corners of the mind where the meaner passions germinate. The man who comes to him is one whom he has always accepted for the soul of honesty and good comradeship, a trusted friend and familiar, reluctant to speak, quite disinterested, free from passion, highly experienced in human life, all honour and devotion and delicacy,—for so



Iago appeared. The game of the adversary was won when Othello first listened. He should have struck Iago, it may be said, at the bare hint, as he smote the turban'd Turk in Aleppo. Iago was well aware of this danger, and bent all the powers of his mind to the crisis. He gives his victim no chance for indignation. Any one who would take the measure of Shakespeare's almost superhuman skill when he rises to meet a difficulty should read the Third Act of *Othello*. The quickest imagination ever given to man is there on its mettle, and racing. There is a horrible kind of reason on Othello's side when he permits Iago to speak. He knew Iago, or so he believed ; Desdemona was a fascinating stranger. Her unlikeness to himself was a part of her attraction ; his only tie to her was the tie of instinct and faith.

 Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
 When hot for certainties in this our life !

Once he begins to struggle with thought, he is in the labyrinth of the monster, and the day is lost.

If Othello is simple as a hero, Desdemona is simple as a saint. From first to last, while she is unconsciously knotting the cords around her, there is no trace, in any speech of hers, of caution or self-regard. She is utterly trustful ; she gives herself away, as the saying is, a hundred times. She is insistent, like a child ; but she never defends herself, and never argues. To the end, she simply cannot believe that things are beyond recovery by the power of love ; after the worst scene of all she still trusts the world, and sleeps. Those misguided and unhappy formalists who put her in the witness-box of a police-court, and accuse her of untruth, should be forbidden



to read Shakespeare. She was heavenly true. Her answer concerning the handkerchief—"It is not lost : but what and if it were ?"—is a pathetic and childlike attempt to maintain the truth of her relation to her husband. How can she know that she is at the bar before a hostile judge, and that her answer will be used against her ? If she knew, she would refuse to plead. Othello's question is false in all its implications, which appear vaguely and terribly in his distraught manner. The mischief is already done : in her distress and bewilderment she clutches at words which express one truth at least, the truth that she has done him no wrong. Sir Walter Scott, it may be remembered, with infinitely less at stake, used almost Desdemona's form of words in reply to the question whether he was the author of the Waverley Novels.

If Desdemona had accepted the inhumanity of the position, and, on general grounds of principle, had replied by a statement of the bare fact, she might be a better lawyer in her own cause, but she would forfeit her angel's estate. So also, at those many points in the play where a cool recognition of her danger and a determination to be explicit might have saved her, we cannot wish that she should so save herself. She is tactless, it is said, in her solicitations on behalf of Cassio ; but it is the tactlessness of unfaltering faith. When anger and suspicion intrude upon her paradise she cannot deal with them reasonably, as those can who expect them. She is a child to chiding, as she says to Emilia ; and a child that shows tact and calmness in managing its elders is not loved the better for it.

The simplicity and purity of these two characters gives to Iago the material of his craft. The sovereign skill of



that craft, and his artist's delight in it, have procured him worship, so that he has been enthroned as a kind of evil God. But if no such man ever existed, yet the elements of which he is composed are easy to find in ordinary life. All the cold passions of humanity are compacted in his heart. His main motives are motives of every day—pride in self, contempt for others, delight in irresponsible power. In any human society it may be noted how innocence and freedom win favour by their very ease, and it may be noted also how they arouse a certain sense of hostility in more difficult and grudging spirits. Iago is not an empty dream. But if goodness is sometimes stupid, so is wickedness. Iago can calculate, but he takes no account of the self-forgetful passions. He is surprised by Othello's great burst of pity ; when Desdemona kneels at his feet and implores his help to regain her husband's affection, his words seem to betoken some embarrassment, and he makes haste to end the interview. He does not understand any one with whom he has to deal ; not Othello, nor Desdemona, nor Cassio, nor his own wife Emilia, and this last misunderstanding involves him in the ruin of his plot.

Shakespeare flinches at nothing : he makes Desdemona kneel to Iago, and sends her to her death without the enlightenment that comes at last to Othello when he discovers his hideous error. She could bear more than Othello for her love had not wavered. There is a strange sense of triumph even in this appalling close. Shakespeare's treatment of the mystery does not much vary from tragedy to tragedy. In *Othello* the chances were all against the extreme issue ; at a dozen points in the story a slip or an accident would have brought Iago's fabric about his ears.



Yet out of these materials, Shakespeare seems to say, this result may be wrought ; and the Heavens will permit it. He points to no conclusion, unless it be this, that the greatest and loveliest virtues, surpassing the common measure, are not to be had for nothing. They must suffer for their greatness. In life they suffer silently, without fame. In Shakespeare's art they are made known to us, and wear their crown. Desdemona and Othello are both made perfect in the act of death, so that the idea of murder is lost and forgotten in the sense of sacrifice.

(e) BY FRANCOIS-VICTOR HUGO.¹

The rôle of Othello was "created" by Richard Burbage, the greatest tragedian of Shakespeare's age. It was "round" this individual, concerning whose career very little is known, that Shakespeare "wrote" not only his *Othello*, but likewise his *Hamlet*, *Romeo*, *Henry V*, *Shylock*, *Macbeth*, etc. ; no doubt often adapting the action and utterance of these different characters to the temperament and the genius for impersonation of the leading actor of his company.

That Othello was Burbage's masterpiece of presentation can be gathered from the touching elegy composed in 1619 shortly after this tragedian's death :

No more young HAMLET, though but scant of breath,
Shall cry revenge for his dear father's death.
Poor ROMEO never more shall tears beget
For Julia's love and cruel Capulet.
HARRY shall not be seen as King or Prince.

¹ *Oeuvres Complètes de W. Shakespeare*, Tome v, Introduction. In this translation we have condensed and otherwise taken liberties with the original, but the subject-matter is Hugo's.



They died with thee, dear Dick,
 Not to revive again.
 Tyrant MACBETH, with unwash'd bloody hand,
 We vainly now may hope to understand.
 BRUTUS and MARCIUS¹ henceforth must be dumb,
 For ne'er upon our stage thy like shall come...
 And his whole action he would change with ease,
 From ancient LEAR to youthful PERICLES.
But let me not forget one chiefest part
Wherein, beyond the rest, he moved the heart—
The grieved Moor, made jealous by a slave,
Who sent his wife to fill a timeless [untimely] grave,
Then slew himself upon the bloody bed,
 All these, and many more, with him are dead.

Tradition adds nothing to what we find in these verses regarding Burbage's manner of acting Othello : it throws no light upon the vexed questions of Othello's colour and race which have so much divided the opinions of critics and stage-managers.

Schlegel conceives Othello to be racially a woolly-haired negro, and morally a sensualist ; and this judgment warps his whole interpretation of the play :

“ Othello presents a strongly-shaded picture : we might call it a tragical Rembrandt.—What a fortunate mistake that the Moor,—under which name was unquestionably meant, in the Italian novel, a baptized Saracen of the northern coast of Africa—has been made by Shakespeare, in every respect, a negro ! We recognize in Othello the wild nature of the glowing tropical zone, which generates the most raging beasts of prey and the most deadly poisons,—tamed only in appearance by the desire of military renown,

¹ Caius Marcius Coriolanus.



by subjection to foreign laws of honour, and by the nobler and milder manners of the city of his adoption.

“His jealousy is not the jealousy of the heart, which is incompatible with the tenderest feeling for and the loftiest adoration of the beloved object ; nay, it is of that sensual kind from which, in burning climes, has originated the disgraceful ill-treatment of womankind and many other unnatural usages.”

With this judgment upon Othello's character Guizot and De Broglie are frankly in accord : “Scratch the man of Barbary and underneath you will find the barbarian !”

But from this it inevitably follows that Iago's pronouncement on Desdemona's marriage was unimpeachably correct :

Othello. And yet, how nature erring from itself,—

Iago. Ay, there's the point ; as—to be bold with you— •

Not to affect many proposed matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree, •
Whereto we see in all things nature tends—
Foh ! one may smell in such a will most rank,
Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural.—
But pardon me ; I do not in position
Distinctly speak of her, though I may fear
Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,
May fall to match you with her country forms
And happily repent.

Instead of marrying this soldier of fortune from an unknown country, better for Desdemona had she bestowed her hand upon the first man from among her own countrymen who presented himself before her in the character of a suitor ! Why not even upon Roderigo himself ? True, he was a ninny ; but he had always one signal advantage over Othello,—he had a white skin !



But we know that poor Desdemona saw things otherwise. She allowed herself to be led away by a fatal curiosity about this exotic stranger ; and as she listened to the epic of his life-history she was carried off her feet before she knew it ! Perilous sympathy ! Better for her at that moment had she laughed in his face than to have allowed him to beguile her of her tears. But Desdemona imagined that she was listening to a veritable hero ! And as she surrendered herself to the spell of his rude eloquence she forgot all about Othello's colour. She saw nothing but his sparkling eyes, his kindling brow, his whole physiognomy radiant with enthusiasm—and she found him beautiful ! Such a life-story as his was to her a declaration of love the noblest that could be addressed to any of her sex, and she responded to it with an answering avowal. Insensate woman ! The warrior of her fond imagination was only a savage ! Her paladin was only a barbarian !

But there is another side to the question regarding Othello's race and colour, a side that is eloquently championed by Coleridge in many parts of his writings :

“ Othello must not be conceived as a negro, but as a high and chivalrous Moorish chief. Can we imagine Shakespeare so utterly ignorant as to make a barbarous negro plead royal birth,—at a time, too, when negroes were not known except as slaves ? ”

If the present writer be permitted to take his part in a controversy which has divided so many famous critics, he would without hesitation range himself on the side of Coleridge. The fact that Roderigo describes Othello as “ the thick-lips ” is sufficiently explained on the



ground of rivalry in love—"ill-will never said well." It is true that Othello once describes himself as "black," but "black" in the idiom of Shakespeare's time was often used as the equivalent of "dark" [see notes on 2. 1. 132 and 3. 3. 263]. In *The Merchant of Venice* we find in the person of the noble Prince of Morocco a man of the same race and complexion as Othello, one who is in some respects a kind of first sketch of the more heroic character. Among the *stage-directions* of the Quarto of 1600 [not to be found in our standard editions to-day] occurs the following, showing us how the Prince of Morocco was represented on the Elizabethan stage and giving us (we believe) the clue to the problem under discussion :

"Enter Morochus¹ a tawny Moore all in white."

If Shakespeare willed that the Moor who offered himself in marriage to Portia (and was refused by her) should wear the dusky complexion of the Arab race, is it in the least likely that he intended us to think of the suitor who carried off the fair Desdemona as wearing the black skin of the kafir? Over Othello's noble features Shakespeare might indeed throw the dusky shade of the twilight, but hardly the blackness of the night. We imagine that Othello is part of the picturesque scenery of the play ; that he is exhibited on the stage for the delight of our eyes.

With all respect to the German critic afore-cited, we conclude, then, that Othello is to be conceived as belonging to the same race that produced a Saladin and an Harun-al-Rashid, the same race that in the great days of yore confronted our chevaliers with its sheikhs, our princes with its

¹ Latin for "man of Morocco."



emirs, our emperors with its caliphs. Rivals of the Latin race in war, they won an easy mastery in the pursuits of peace; leading the way in the sciences of astronomy, algebra, and chemistry, and teaching the Christians how to build their most imposing cathedrals. Granada, in point of architectural grandeur, was in no way inferior to Venice itself.

Let us not think that the daughter of the Venetian senator derogated from her rank when she allied herself with the descendant of a line of Saracen kings. The union of Othello and Desdemona was in no sense a *mésalliance*, as many critics have imagined, but a sympathetic fusion of two great types of human beauty, the Semitic and the Aryan. It symbolized the *rapprochement* of the two rival races which, during so many centuries, had contended in war and in peace for the supremacy of the civilized world.

TEXT AND NOTES

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

DUKE OF VENICE.

BRABANTIO, a senator.

Other Senators.

GRATIANO, brother to Brabantio.

LODOVICO, kinsman to Brabantio.

OTHELLO, a noble Moor in the service of the Venetian state.

CASSIO, his lieutenant.

IAGO, his ancient.

RODERIGO, a Venetian gentleman.

MONTANO, Othello's predecessor in the government of Cyprus.

Clown, servant to Othello.

DESDEMONA, daughter to Brabantio and wife to Othello.

EMILIA, wife to Iago.

BIANCA, mistress to Cassio.

Sailor, Messenger, Herald, Officers, Gentlemen,
Musicians, and Attendants.

SCENE : *Venice : a Sea-port in Cyprus.*

Othello, the Moor of Venice

Act First

Scene I

[*Venice. A street.*]

Enter Roderigo and Iago.

Rod. Tush ! never tell me ! I take it much unkindly
That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse

Roderigo is a rejected lover of Desdemona's, but Iago has been encouraging him not to abandon all hope and has been taking large sums of money from him under the pretence of helping him in his suit. Lurking here in the dark under the windows of Brabantio's palace, they two have just been eye-witnesses of Desdemona's escape from her father's home—the event which forms the starting-point of the play—and in the opening dialogue Roderigo is giving vent to his disappointment and vexation of spirit. Throughout the play Roderigo never entirely trusts Iago, and here at the very start he shows some suspicion that Iago is playing a double game, but Iago never has any difficulty in vindicating himself in the eyes of his dupe. That Iago is in reality playing a double game—the game of “running with the hare and hunting with the hounds”—will be evident at the opening of the next scene, where we shall see that he is as much in the confidence of Othello as he is in that of Roderigo.

1. **Tush !** Pshaw ! This interjection expresses impatience and incredulity. **never**=not at all ; the same emphatic form of the adverb of negation that we get in “never mind,” “never fear.” **much**, very.

As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this,—

Iago. 'Sblood, but you'll not hear me.

If ever I did dream of such a matter,

Abhor me.

5

3. the strings, the purse-strings, for opening and closing the mouth of the purse. Figuratively "the purse strings" is used to signify "the control of expenditure."

"The first three lines happily state the nature and foundation of the friendship between Roderigo and Iago—the purse."—Coleridge.

shouldst know of this,—and yet say nothing about it to me. Some such words Roderigo was evidently about to add when he was interrupted by Iago. By "this" is meant the intended elopement.

Roderigo here appears to take against his friend and director "a most just exception" [to use Iago's phrase in 4. 2. 210] "I share my purse with you, yet you do not share your secrets with me!"

Roderigo suspects that Iago has known about Othello's wooing of Desdemona for some time but has withheld the secret from him. Iago, on the other hand, wishes Roderigo to believe that the escape of Desdemona which has taken place before their very eyes is as great a surprise to him as it is to Roderigo himself—**if ever I did dream of such a matter, Abhor me**—though to anybody but a simpleton it must have been obvious that this meeting of Iago and Roderigo, so near Desdemona's home and at so late an hour that night, was not purely accidental.

Iago—at the very hour pre-arranged by the lovers—had brought along Roderigo with a three-fold object in view; to enjoy his dupe's disappointment (for he is devil enough for that), to use him to give the alarm after Desdemona has fled, and to contrive the encounter that takes place in the next scene between the angry father and his unwelcome son-in-law.

4. 'Sblood. A disguised form of "God's blood."

Oaths like this were very common in Shakespeare's time, and their very familiarity had robbed them of much of their original profanity.



Rod. Thou told'st me thou didst hold him in thy hate.

Iago. Despise me, if I do not. Three great ones of the city,

In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,

Off-capp'd to him ; and, by the faith of man, 10

I know my price ; I am worth no worse a place.

They abound in the Quarto text of this play, but were systematically suppressed by the editors of the Folio.

Other sacramental oaths (*i.e.*, oaths having reference to the Passion of Our Lord) occurring in our play are "'zounds" (86, below, and 2. 3. 164), "by the mass" (2. 3. 384) ; and "nd's pity" (4. 3. 75).

It is believed that these were suppressed in the Folio in obedience to the well-known Act of 1605 "to restrain the abuses of players."

7. **didst hold him in thy hate.** This is much stronger than "didst hate him."

Iago bears to Othello "a lodg'd hate and a certain loathing" which he himself cannot account for, though he often attempts to do it. It is this hatred that supplies the motive power which impels him to his diabolical plot.

8.33. In this speech Iago seeks for the first (but not for the last) time to explain his really inexplicable dislike of the Moor. "Of course I hate him," he says to Roderigo ; "for when the post of lieutenant was vacant and no one was better qualified to fill it than myself, did not Othello appoint that incompetent counter-caster Cassio over my head, although three great ones of the city came to him in person and interceded with him on my behalf ? So that I had to eat humble pie and content myself with the inferior place of ancient !"

9. **in personal suit,** coming *in person* on my behalf.

10. **Off-capp'd to him,** stood bare-headed before him, as when soliciting a favour from the great. **by the faith of man,** a form of asseveration = verily, indeed.

11. **my price,** my personal worth.



But he (as loving his own pride and purposes)
 Evades them with a bombast circumstance
 Horribly stuff'd with epithets of war,
 And, in conclusion, 15
 Nonsuits my mediators ; for, " Certes," says he,
 " I have already chose my officer."
 And what was he ?
 Forsooth, a great arithmetician,

12. **as loving... purposes**, because it ministered to his pride and self-will to refuse the personal suit of the great ones of the city.

13. **evades them circumstance**, argues round and round the subject, that he may avoid coming to the point. **bombast**, bombastic, wordy and diffuse, having little reference to the real matter in hand.

" Bombast " literally means cotton-wool, a stuff used in Shakespeare's time for the lining of garments.

14. **stuff'd... war**, inflated with much military terminology.

16. **Nonsuits my mediators**, rejects the suit of those who came to him in my interest.

" To nonsuit " describes the action of a judge who stops a suit because it does not " lie," or because it is not drawn up according to strict form of law. Here, the word cannot be taken in its technical meaning.

" **Certes**," I assure you. An old French word occurring also in *Comedy of Errors*, 4. 4. 78.

19. **Forsooth**, indeed (*sooth*=*truth*). This word is always used in irony. **a great arithmetician**. " Iago means to represent Cassio as a man merely conversant with *civil* matters ; afterwards he calls him this *counter-caster*" (Malone).

One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,
 (A fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife),
 That never set a squadron in the field,
 Nor the division of a battle knows
 More than a spinster, unless the bookish theoric,
 Wherein the toged consuls can propose

20

25

21. **A fellow...wife**, *i.e.*, almost on the point of marrying a fair woman.

This seems the simplest and least objectionable of the many solutions to what has always been regarded as one of the most puzzling lines in the play—Cassio not being a married man. Many commentators tell us confidently that Bianca, who haunted Cassio and gave out that she was to marry him (4. 1. 122) is the "fair wife" here referred to. (We do not, however, remember having seen it pointed out that "Bianca" in Italian = "a fair woman.") But it is not necessary to refer the line to any woman in particular. Iago, like all rogues, is a great calumniator of the fair sex, and is evidently of opinion that a woman's virtue is in inverse ratio to her beauty. (For Touchstone's view about the matter see *As You Like It*, 1. 2. 40 ff.).

23. **the division of a battle**, the disposition of troops in battle array.

24. **a spinster**, an unmarried woman, Here used contemptuously.

unless the bookish theoric, save only the theory of military art as taught in books.

25. **the toged consuls**, the senators clad in their robes of office. The toga was the outer garment worn by Roman citizens. **propose**, talk, discourse.

This meaning (now obsolete) is derived from the French *proposer* = to put forward for consideration.



As masterly as he. Mere prattle without practice
 Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had the election ;
 And I (of whom his eyes had seen the proof
 At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds
 Christen'd and heathen) must be be-lee'd and calm'd 30
 By debtor and creditor ; this counter-caster,

26. **practice**, actual military experience, opposed to **prattle**=empty talk. **had the election**, was chosen by Othello.

There was, of course, no "election" in the sense in which we now understand the word.

28. **the proof**, the trial, the test.

30. **Christen'd**, baptized, as opposed to **heathen**.

Iago means "Christian and non-Christian countries."

be-lee'd and calm'd. The meaning is that Iago was outmanœuvred by his fellow-competitor, that Cassio has been an obstacle to Iago's preferment.

The figure suggests yacht-racing. (Observe Iago's fondness for sea terms). It is the object of each vessel competing in a race to get to the windward of the others, that the others may be forced to fall behind in its wake or be "be-lee'd and calmed." This is the origin of the expression "to take the wind out of one's adversary's sails." By the *lee* is meant the sheltered side, the side away from the wind.

31. **debitor and creditor**, "that is, an accounting-book" (Johnson).

Iago means that a man like Cassio is merely an animated ledger.

counter-caster, a person who makes calculations by the help of counters.

Counters are small disks of metal or ivory, formerly used in "casting" accounts (the idiom has survived the usage), and still in card-games.



He (in good time) must his lieutenant be,

And I—God bless the mark!—his Moorship's ancient.

Rod. By heaven, I rather would have been his hangman.

Iago. Why, there's no remedy. 'Tis the curse of service, 35

Preferment goes by letter and affection,

And not by old gradation, where each second

Stood heir to the first. Now, sir, be judge yourself

Whether I in any just term am affin'd

To love the Moor.

32. **in good time.** An exclamation expressing astonishment—"did you ever hear the like?"

33. **God bless the mark!** These words serve merely to punctuate Iago's indignation that a man like *him* should have been passed over!

Moorship's is a coinage of Iago travestying the usual word "Worship's."

["Worship's" is the Quarto reading, but the "W" is probably due to confusion with "M"—perhaps an inverted "M." Upturned letters are a frequent cause of diversity of reading in the present play.]

ancient is a corruption of "ensign," an officer whose duty it was to carry the ensign or flag of his company or regiment.

35. **there's no remedy,** there is no help for this state of things.

36. **by letter and affection,** by letters of recommendation and favouritism.

37. **old gradation,** promotion according to seniority.

39. **in any just term,** within the ordinary limits of reason or justice. **affin'd,** under obligation, bound.



OTHELLO

[ACT I

Rod. I would not follow him then. 40

Iago. O, sir, content you ;

I follow him to serve my turn upon him.

We cannot all be masters, nor all masters

Cannot be truly follow'd. You shall mark

Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave, 45

That (doting on his own obsequious bondage)

Wears out his time, much like his master's ass,

"Affined" occurs again, and nearly in this same sense, in 2. 3. 218.

41-65. "True it is," says Iago, "that I have enlisted in Othello's ranks, but I have done so to serve my own ends. In following him, I follow but myself. Outwardly I may seem to be his obsequious follower, but I am no such simpleton as to exhibit my real character in my external demeanour.—Ere I do any such thing, you will see me wearing my heart upon my sleeve for the daws to peck at."

42 to serve my turn upon him, to further my own secret designs against him.

43. nor all masters cannot=nor can all masters. Double negative.

44. You shall mark, *i.e.*, you will often observe.

45. knee-crooking, obsequious, fawning, cringing.

Cp. *Hamlet*, 3. 2. 66 :

And *crook* the pregnant hinges of the knee.

knave, menial or valet, man of low condition.

This word (like German "knabe" and French "garçon") meant originally "boy" ; then it came to mean "servant" from the common habit of calling servants "boys."

46. doting on...bondage, stupidly devoted to his master's interest. obsequious=compliant to excess (a transferred epithet).

For nought but provender, and when he's old, cashier'd.^{dismiss}
Whip me such honest knaves. Others there are
Who, trimm'd in forms and visages of duty, 50
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,
And, throwing but shows of service on their lords,
Do well thrive by them, and when they have lin'd
their coats
Do themselves homage. These fellows have some soul;
And such a one do I profess myself. For, sir, 55
It is as sure as you are Roderigo,
Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago.

48. **For nought but provender**, *i.e.*, simply to keep base life afoot.

"Provender" is dry food for domestic animals. Iago's metaphor is expanded at some length in *Julius Caesar*, 4. 1. 19-30.

cashier'd, paid off, driven out of service.

49. **me** is the ethical dative, showing the speaker's interest in what he says.

50. **trimm'd...duty**. studied in the art of make-believe, wearing an outward semblance of fidelity. **visages**, hypocritical looks.

53. **lin'd their coats**, filled their pockets at their master's expense. The idiom to-day would be "feathered their nests."

54. **Do themselves homage**, *i.e.*, are to all intents and purposes their own masters (as explained in 51, above, and 58 below).

57. **I would not be Iago**, "there would be no need for me to play this malicious rôle" (Lee).



In following him, I follow but myself ;
Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,

But seeming so, for my peculiar end ; 60

For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart

In compliment extern, 'tis not long after

imp But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve

For daws to peck at. I am not what I am. 65

59. **not I for love or duty.** Though these words are out of syntactical relation, the actor can throw great force and meaning into them.

61. **demonstrate,** show, set forth, manifest.

This word has not here the meaning of "prove" which it has in 3. 3. 431.

62. **native,** innate, genuine. **figure,** image, expression.

Cp. *Romeo and Juliet*, 1. 2. 194: "I would know thy heart.—'Tis figured in my tongue."

63. **compliment extern,** outward demeanour.

64-65. **wear my heart...peck at,** take the whole world, so to speak, into my confidence, openly expose my secret thoughts for every fool to pry into.

"That is to say, it is no more likely that the respect he shows outwardly shall be felt inwardly, than that he should freely expose his secret thoughts to every knave."—Hunter.

The daw or jackdaw (perhaps the most despised of all the feathered tribes) is often taken as the type of the foolish chatterer. Iago's words have passed into a familiar proverbial phrase.

65. **I am not what I am,** *i.e.*, not what I appear to the world. This Iago may well say, for to all his acquaintances he is "the honest Iago."

Outwardly he is Dr. Jekyll, inwardly he is Mr. Hyde. (See note on 4. 2. 134.)



Rod. What a full fortune does the thick-lips owe,
If he can carry't thus !

Iago. Call up her father,
Rouse him. Make after him, poison his delight,
Proclaim him in the streets. Incense her kinsmen,
And, though he in a fertile climate dwell, 70
Plague him with flies. Though that his joy be joy,
Yet throw such changes of vexation on't,
As it may lose some colour. *changes of circumstances*

Rod. Here is her father's house ; I'll call aloud.

Iago. Do, with like timorous accent and dire yell 75
As when, by night and negligence, the fire
Is spied in populous cities. *as one who has been alarmed*

Rod. What, ho, Brabantio ! Signior Brabantio, ho !

66. **the thick-lips**, the thick-lipped Moor. Roderigo disdainfully applies this opprobrious epithet to his successful rival, but it cannot fairly be taken as truly descriptive of Othello. **owe**, own, possess.

67. **carry't thus**, win Desdemona in this irregular fashion.

68. **Rouse him** = Brabantio. **Make after him** = Othello. **Proclaim him**, shout out his name as a law-breaker, start a hue and cry in the streets. Cp. "a proclaimed prize." *King Lear*, 4. 6. 230.

71. **flies**, i.e., petty vexations.—**that** is a conjunctive affix, here employed to complete the measure of the verse.

75. **timorous** has an active meaning = causing fear.

76. **by night and negligence**, at night and through negligence. A kind of zeugma.



Iago. Awake ! what, ho, Brabantio ! thieves ! thieves !
 Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags ! 80
 Thieves ! thieves !

Brabantio [*appears*] *above, at a window.*

Bra. What is the reason of this terrible summons ?

What is the matter there ?

Rod. Signior, is all your family within ?

Iago. Are your doors lock'd ?

Bra. Why, wherefore ask you this ?

Iago. 'Zounds, sir, you're robb'd ! For shame, put on your
 gown. 86

Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul ;

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram

Is tugging your white ewe. Arise, arise !

Awake the snorting citizens with the bell, 90

Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.

81. *Stage-direction.* Brabantio now appears upon the balcony, as the raised platform at the rear of the stage was called.

86. '**Zounds**. A corruption of "God's wounds" : cp. note on "'Sblood," 4, above.

87. **burst**, broken. Cp. "Then *burst* his mighty heart." *Julius Cæsar*, 3. 2. 190. **half your soul**, *i.e.*, Desdemona, who as Brabantio's only child is half his existence.

90. **snorting** : obsolete for "snoring."

"Falstaff ! Fast asleep and *snorting* like a horse." *I Henry IV*, 2. 4. 573.

91. **the devil**. This designation is again applied to Othello, by the same speaker, in 2. 1. 229. It refers to his complexion.



Arise, I say !

Bra. What, have you lost your wits ?

Rod. Most reverend signior, do you know my voice ?

Bra. Not I. What are you ?

Rod. My name is Roderigo.

Bra. The worser welcome ; 95

I have charg'd thee not to haunt about my doors.

In honest plainness thou hast heard me say

My daughter is not for thee ; and now, in madness,

Being full of supper and distemp'ring draughts,

Upon malicious bravery dost thou come 100

To start my quiet.

Rod. Sir, sir, sir,—

Bra. But thou must needs be sure

My spirits and my place have in them power

To make this bitter to thee.

Rod. Patience, good sir.

Bra. What tell'st thou me of robbing ? This is Venice ;

My house is not a grange. 105

Rod. Most grave Brabantio,

96. **haunt about**, beset, loiter in the neighbourhood of.

99. **distemp'ring draughts**, draughts of intoxicating liquor.

"Distemper" was a common word in Shakespeare's time for "intoxication." Cp. *Henry V*, 2. 2. 54: "Little faults proceeding on distemper."

100. **Upon malicious bravery**, led by a malicious desire to brave or annoy me.

101. **To start my quiet**, to disturb my repose.

In simple and pure soul I come to you.

Iago. 'Zounds, sir, you are one of those that will not serve God, if the devil bid you. Because we come to do you service and you think we are ruffians, 110 you'll have your daughter cover'd with a Barbary horse; you'll have your nephews neigh to you; you'll have coursers for cousins, and gennets for *relations* germans.

Bra. What profane wretch art thou? 115

Iago. I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs. -

Bra. Thou art a villain.

Iago. You are—a senator.

Bra. This thou shalt answer; I know thee, Roderigo. 120

106. **a grange**, a lonely farm in the country where a robbery might easily be committed. This word comes from Latin *granum*, grain. *The farm of a monastery.*

112. **a Barbary horse**, a breed of horses originally from Barbary, an extensive region in the north of Africa; a barb.

Iago means that Othello hails from this part of the world; which derives its name from the Greek word *barbaria*—the country of the barbarians.

113. **nephews**, grandchildren (like Latin *nepotes*).

The word has this now obsolete sense in *1 Timothy*, 5. 4.

coursers, race-horses.

114. **gennets**, horses of Spanish breed. **germans**, kinsfolk, relations. Note the three-fold alliteration.

115. **profane**, obscene, foul-mouthed.

Rod. Sir, I will answer anything. But, I beseech you,
 If 't be your pleasure and most wise consent,
 As partly I find it, that your fair daughter is,
 At this odd-even and dull watch o' the night,
 Transported, with no worse nor better guard 125
 But with a knave of common hire, a gondolier,
 To the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor,—
 If this be known to you and your allowance,
 We then have done you bold and saucy wrongs ;
 But if you know not this, my ^{house of} manners tell me 130
 We have your wrong rebuke. Do not believe

121-141. This speech contains all the information given to us about the circumstances of Desdemona's marriage. It is noteworthy that she did not run away with the Moor, but was accompanied to the Moor's lodging by a *gondolier*—the only touch in the play that reminds us that Venice is a city of canals. Roderigo evidently speaks as an eye-witness, and there is a ring of sincerity in his words which carries conviction to Brabantio's mind.

[123. Following Hart's suggestion, we have carried **is** to its right place, at the end of the verse.]

124. **odd-even and dull watch.** Sentinels divide the night into 3 or 4 equal portions known as "watches." The *middle watch* seems to be the one referred to by this vague and unusual description.

126. **But, than.** **with** is redundant. **a knave,** a servant. **of common hire,** *i.e.*, plying his gondola for hire on the canals of Venice.

128. **and your allowance,** and if this thing has your recognition or approval.

129. **saucy,** insolent.

131. **we have your wrong rebuke,** we are unjustly rebuked by you.

That, from the sense of all civility,
 I thus would play and trifle with your reverence.
 Your daughter, if you have not given her leave,
 I say again, hath made a gross revolt ; 135
 Tying her duty, beauty, wit, and fortunes
 In an extravagant and wheeling stranger
 Of here and everywhere. Straight satisfy yourself.
 If she be in her chamber or your house,
 Let loose on me the justice of the state 140
 For thus deluding you.

Bru. Strike on the tinder, ho !
 Give me a taper ! Call up all my people !
 This accident is not unlike my dream ;
 Belief of it oppresses me already.
 Light, I say ! light ! *Exit [above].*
Iago. Farewell ; for I must leave you. 145

132. **from**, at variance with, contrary to. *away*

136. **In**, to. **extravagant**. This word in Shakespeare never = "wasteful" but always = "straying," "roaming," "vagrant." **wheeling** conveys a similar meaning.

"Roderigo says that Desdemona is gone off with a stranger—an erratic and shifting man that will have no home for her."—Knight.

141. **Strike on the tinder**. Tinder is an inflammable substance (such as scorched linen) which readily catches fire from the spark produced when flint is struck against steel.

143. **accident**, unexpected occurrence. Cp. 5. 1. 94. **my dream**. We find dreams in Shakespeare foreshadowing both good and evil. Brabantio appears to be a superstitious old man. *Ep. Richard III.*



SCENE I] THE MOOR OF VENICE

17

It seems not meet, nor wholesome to my place,
To be produc'd—as, if I stay, I shall—
Against the Moor ; for, I do know, the state,
However this may gall him with some check,
Cannot with safety cast him, for he's embark'd 150
With such ^{urgent} loud reason to the Cyprus wars,
Which even now stand in act, that, for their souls,
Another of his fathom they have none,
To lead their business ; in which regard,

146-160. Iago, who has kept himself in the background during the above dialogue, now slinks away unseen, but not before giving Roderigo directions to conduct Brabantio and his train to the Sagittary.

146. **wholesome to my place**, befitting my office as the Moor's ancient.

148. **the state**, the Venetian republic.

149. **this**, the abduction of Desdemona. **gall him with some check**, harass or annoy him by bringing down on his head the rebuke of the senate.

"Check" = "censure," "rebuke"; and occurs again in this sense in 3. 3. 67 and 4. 2. 20.

150. **cast him**, dismiss him from their service ; break him, as we would say to-day.

150-151. **embark'd...to**, entered on. **the Cyprus wars**. This prepares us for the next scene.

152. **stand in act**, are imminent, can begin at any moment. **for their souls**, if their souls (or their lives) depended upon it.

153. **fathom**, capacity, ability.

154. **in which regard**, and with respect to this business.



Though I do hate him as I do hell-pains, 155
 Yet, for necessity of present life,
 I must show out a flag and sign of love,
 Which is indeed but sign. That you shall surely
 find him,
 Lead to the Sagittary the raised search ;

157. **show out**, hang out (but merely to save or keep up appearances). **flag and sign**. (Cp. the word "ensign.") These terms are used synonymously. Cp. *Richard III*, 4. 4. 89 :

A sign of dignity, a garish flag.

A flag was wont to be flown from the turret of an Elizabethan play-house to give public notice of a performance, and to this day a flag is employed for the purpose of advertising an auction. This very old usage is the best comment on Iago's words

158. **Which is indeed but sign**. Note the quibble on the two different senses of "sign," viz., (1) signal and (2) semblance.

For "sign" = "semblance" cp. *Much Ado*, 4. 1. 43 :

She's but the sign and semblance of her honour.

159. **the Sagittary**. This was probably the sign of an inn, or private house. Knight explained it as "the residence at the arsenal of the commanding officers of the navy and army of the republic," but it was obviously an obscure building: cp. 1. 3. 121.

Sagittarius, or the Archer, is the name of one of the 12 signs of the zodiac. Cp. the "Centaur," as the sign of an inn at Ephesus (*Errors*, 1. 2. 9).

159. **the raised search**, the body of searchers who are to be raised from their slumbers and set in motion to find the fugitives.



And there will I be with him. So, farewell. 160

Exit.

*Enter below, Brabantio in his night-gown, and
Servants with torches.*

Bra. It is too true an evil ; gone she is ;
And what's to come of my despised time
Is nought but bitterness. Now, Roderigo,
Where didst thou see her ? (O unhappy girl !)
With the Moor, say'st thou ? (Who would be a
father !) 165

How didst thou know 'twas she ? (O, she deceives me
Past thought !) What said she to you ? Get more
tapers ;

Raise all my kindred. Are they married, think you ?

Rod. Truly, I think they are.

161-198. These lines are spoken under great excitement. The main body of the speech—addressed to Roderigo—is three times broken in upon by the old man's outbursts of passionate lamentation.

[These three ejaculations are marked off in the Folios by parentheses (as above). The parentheses are possibly from Shakespeare's pen, and surely ought not to be omitted, as they always appear to be, in modern editions.]

161. **an evil**, a calamity, a misfortune.

162. **my despised time**, the remainder of my wretched existence.

167. **past thought**, beyond imagination.

you. "The change in the number of the pronoun indicates a change of Brabantio's attitude towards Roderigo, whom at the end of the scene he addresses as 'good Roderigo'" (Macmillan).



Bar. O heaven ! How got she out ? O treason of the
blood !

170

Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds
By what you see them act. Are there not charms
By which the property of youth and maidhood
May be abus'd ? Have you not read, Roderigo,
Of some such thing ?

Rod. Yes, sir, I have indeed. 175

Bra. Call up my brother. O, would you had had her !
Some one way, some another. Do you know
Where we may apprehend her and the Moor ?

Rod. I think I can discover him, if you please

To get good guard and go along with me. 180

Bra. Pray you, lead on. At every house I'll call ;
I may command at most. Get weapons, ho !

170. **O treason of the blood !** "The blood" here =
blood-relationship, consanguinity.

Brabantio's exclamation vividly reminds us of Shylock's violent outburst against his daughter Jessica (*Merch. of Venice*, 3. 1. 37) : "My own flesh and blood to rebel !"

172-174. **Are there not...abused ?** "*i.e.*, by which the faculties of a young virgin may be infatuated, and made subject to illusions and false imagination" (Johnson).
charms, spells. **property**, natural disposition. **abus'd**, deceived.

176. **Call up my brother**, *i.e.*, Gratiano, who does not appear in the play till Act 5, Scene 1.

182. **I may command at most**, *i.e.*, my word is law at most Venetian houses.

080 C. U.

B C U 701



And raise some special officers of night.
On, good Roderigo ; I'll deserve your pains.

Exeunt.

Scene II

[*Another street.*]

Enter Othello, Iago, and Attendants with torches.

Iago. Though in the trade of war I have slain men,
Yet do I hold it very stuff o' the conscience
To do no contriv'd murder. I lack iniquity
Sometimes to do me service. Nine or ten times

183. **officers of night**, night watchmen.

184. **I'll deserve your pains.** To Roderigo these words would convey a promise that he can have Desdemona for himself, if he can rescue her from the Moor.

— GS 28 24

This scene takes place in front of the Sagittary, Desdemona's temporary retreat. Iago, our "damnable, both-sides rogue" (*All's Well*, 4. 3. 251) has now joined Othello and tells him about the hue and cry that has been raised against him at the instigation (Iago would have him believe) of the scurvy Roderigo, whom he here defames in no measured terms. Brabantio's band is preceded by a deputation from the Duke, summoning Othello to attend a meeting of the senate. Thither they all go in a body at the end of the scene.

2. **very stuff o' the conscience**, "Stuff is matter, material, not in the sense of something worthless. It is the very substance of the conscience" (Knight).

3. **contriv'd**, deliberate, premeditated.

3-4. **I lack iniquity . . . service.** He means that the tenderness of his conscience has sometimes prevented him from acting as he was inclined to do; for instance, it has hitherto prevented him from murdering Roderigo.



I'd thought to have yerked him here under the ribs. 5

Oth. 'Tis better as it is.

Iago.

Nay, but he prated,

And spoke such scurvy and provoking terms

Against your honour

That, with the little godliness I have,

I did full hard forbear him. But I pray you, sir, 10

Are you fast married? Be assur'd of this,

That the magnifico is much belov'd,

And hath in his effect a voice potential

As double as the Duke's. He will divorce you ;

Or put upon you what restraint and grievance 15

The law, with all his might to enforce it on,

Will give him cable. *opportunity*

5. **to have yerked him ... ribs**, to have driven my stiletto into his heart. **here** : pointing to the vital spot (said to be under the fifth rib) ; Iago knew it well.

him. This seems to refer to *Roderigo*, though the French commentator Gerard thinks that *Brabantio* is meant.

There are several other ambiguous pronouns in the play : Iago rarely refers to persons he dislikes by their names. Cp. 2. 1. 292.

7. **scurvy**, scurrilous, abusive.

10. **forbear him**, forbear *to kill* him.

12. **the Magnifico**. A title given to the chief men of Venice.

13. **his, its. a voice ... Duke's**, an influence among the senators twice as powerful as that of the Duke himself.

restraint and grievance, grievous restraint ; hendiadys.

16. **enforce it on**, strain the severity of the law.

17. **give him cable**, allow him scope.

Cp. our present idiom "to give one rope" = to let one have full liberty.

Oth.

Let him do his spite ;

My services which I have done the signiory

Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know,—

Which, when I know that 'boasting is' an honour,

I shall promulgate—I fetch my life and being

From men of royal siege, and my demerits

May speak (unbonneted) to as proud a fortune

As this that I have reach'd ; for know, Iago,

17. his spite, anything his malice prompts him to do.

the signiory, the senate, the governing body of Venice.

21. promulgate. This word is a corrupt form of "provulgate" (the reading of the Quarto) = make known to the people (Latin *vulgus* = the people).22. I fetch . . . siege. I am a prince, though my Venetian employers know me only as a soldier. "Siege" here = rank or position (French *siège* = seat).

Only here, and when speaking in confidence to Iago, does Othello disclose his royal lineage : we may rest assured that, as far as Iago is concerned, the Venetians will remain in their present ignorance.

demerits, achievements. (Latin *demerita* = *merita*),This word, now used in the sense of *ill deserts* was once an emphatic form of *merits*. Cp. "Henry Conway, Esq. for his singular demerits, received the dignity of knighthood." Dugdale's *Warwickshire*.

23. unbonneted. with the cap off, without need of deferential observance.

The sense of *obeisance*, which some attach to this word, is quite foreign to the meaning here. Othello speaks as a man who is conscious of his worth and as one who, in taking Desdemona to be his wife, has not married above his degree.

speak . . . to is to be understood in the sense of "aspire to," "lay claim to."

But that I love the gentle Desdemona, 25
 I would not my unhoused free condition
 Put into circumscription and confine
 For the sea's worth. But, look! what lights come yond?

Enter Cassio, with lights, Officers, and torches.

Iago. Those are the raised father and his friends.

You were best go in.

Oth. Not I; I must be found. 30

My parts, my title, and my perfect soul

Shall manifest me rightly. Is it they?

Iago. By Janus, I think no.

Oth. The servants of the Duke, and my lieutenant.

26. **unhoused**, without fixed residence, having no ties of home.

This is equivalent to "unmarried." In Italian "casa" = "a house" and "casare" = "to marry."

27. **circumscription and confine**, the limits to personal liberty imposed by matrimony.

for the sea's worth, for all the sunken treasure at the bottom of the sea.

20. **You were best go in**, it would be best for you to go in. Iago advises him to take shelter in the "Sagittary."

I must be found. Othello's nobility of spirit saves him from following this treacherous advice. ("Shall Caesar hide himself?")

31. **parts**, actions. Cp. "his valiant parts" (1-2-254). **perfect soul**, conscious innocence—the *mens sibi conscia recti* (mind conscious of its own rectitude) of Virgil.

33. **By Janus**. Our "both-sides rogue" not inappropriately swears by the double-faced Roman god.



The goodness of the night upon you, friends !

35

What is the news ?

Cas. The Duke does greet you, general,
And he requires your haste-post-haste appearance,
Even on the instant.

Oth. What is the matter, think you ?

Cas. Something from Cyprus, as I may divine ;
It is a business of some heat. The galleys 40
Have sent a dozen sequent messengers
This very night at one another's heels,
And many of the consuls, rais'd and met,
Are at the Duke's already. You have been hotly
call'd for ;

When, being not at your lodging to be found, 45
The Senate hath sent about three several quests
To search you out.

Oth. 'Tis well I am found by you.

35. **The goodness...friends.** A stately salutation suitable to the time of night, and showing the speaker's calmness of soul.

37. **haste-post-haste**, immediate, urgent : cp. " post-post-haste," 1. 3. 46.

" The words ' Haste, post, haste ' were, in our author's time, usually written on the cover of packets or letters sent express." Ritson.

40. **heat**, urgency ; as " hotly " (44) = " urgently."

41. **sequent**, following one upon the other.

43. **consuls**, councillors, senators.

46. **sent about three several quests**, sent hither and thither three different search-parties :



I will but spend a word here in the house,

And go with you.

Exit.

Cas. Ancient, what makes he here?

Iago. Faith, he to-night hath boarded a land carack. 50

If it prove lawful prize, he's made for ever.

Cas. I do not understand.

Iago. He's married.

Cas. To who?

[*Re-enter Othello.*]

Iago. Marry, to—Come, captain, will you go?

Oth. Have with you.

Cas. Here comes another troop to seek for you.

48. **spend a word**, have a word with Desdemona to take leave of her before going to the signiory.

49. **what makes he here?** What is he doing here?

50. **boarded a land-carack**, captured an enemy vessel.

A carrack was a Spanish galleon, "large, round-built, and fitted for fight as well as burden." We have seen how often Iago uses sea figures and here he compares Othello's happy conquest of Desdemona to a successful naval operation.

51. **If it prove lawful prize**, if the prize-court raise no objection to the legality of the capture. **he's made for ever**, he has made his fortune, his future is assured.

Admiralty Courts were already in existence in Elizabethan times having jurisdiction of all vessels captured at sea. The Duke and his council are like such a court, and until they have pronounced in his favour, Othello cannot be held to have won Desdemona.

53. **Have with you**, I'll go with you. This expression denotes readiness on the speaker's part.



Enter Brabantio, Roderigo, and Officers with torches and weapons.

Iago. It is Brabantio. General, be advis'd ;

55

He comes to bad intent.

Oth.

Holla ! stand there !

Rod. Signior, it is the Moor.

Bra.

Down with him, thief !

[*They draw on both sides.*]

Iago. You, Roderigo ! come, sir, I am for you.

Oth. Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them,

55. **be advis'd**, remember my warning : cp. 29, above.

58. **I am for you.** Iago singles out Roderigo as his opponent.

"By drawing his sword against Roderigo, he keeps up the pretence of violent indignation against Roderigo expressed by his words at the beginning of the scene, and also puts himself in a position to prevent his useful tool from being killed or wounded in the scuffle." (Macmillan).

59. **keep up your bright swords**, do not draw your swords from their scabbards.

This line has a parallel in *K. John*, 4. 3. 78 : "Your sword is bright, sir, put it up again."

[The traditional stage-direction (due to Rowe and therefore bracketed) seems inconsistent with the words of the text and does scant justice to our hero. Seeing that swords are about to be drawn, Othello asserts his authority to keep them in their sheaths.]



Good signior, you shall more command with years 60
Than with your weapons.

Bra. O thou foul thief, where hast thou stow'd my
daughter?

Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her ;
For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
If she in chains of magic were not bound, 65
Whether a maid so tender, fair, and happy,
So opposite to marriage that she shunn'd
The wealthy curled darlings of our nation,

60. **more command with years...weapons**, *i.e.*, gentleness will do more here than violence.

We find the sentiment in *As You Like It*, 2. 7. 103, where the Duke says to Orlando :

Your gentleness shall force,
More than your force move us to gentleness.

In *Pericles*, 2. 2. 27 the sentiment is given in the form of a Spanish proverb : *Piu por dulzura que por fureza*.

63. **Damn'd as thou art.** Othello is thus addressed because he is supposed to be a *magician*. **enchanted her**, subdued her by wicked charms.

Cp. *As You Like It*, 5. 2. 68 : " A magician, most profound in his art, and yet not *damnable*."

64. **refer me to all things of sense**, call to witness on my behalf every creature possessed of reasoning powers.

65. **in chains of magic.** Cp. *Tit. Andronicus*, 2. 1. 15 : "Fettered in amorous *chains*."

67. **opposite**, disinclined, averse.

68. **curled**, well groomed, having well-trimmed locks.

darlings, *exquisites* (*alias* coxcombs, fops).

The word is a corruption of "dearlings" (as it is spelt in the Folio).



Would ever have (to incur a general mock)
 Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom 70
 Of such a thing as thou ; to fear, not to delight.
 Judge me the world, if 'tis not gross in sense
 That thou hast practis'd on her with foul charms,
 Abus'd her delicate youth with drugs or minerals
 That weaken motion. I'll have't disputed on ;
 'Tis probable, and palpable to thinking. 76
 I therefore apprehend and do attach thee
 For an abuser of the world, a practiser

70. **guardage**, guardianship. **sooty bosom**. So Desdemona's bosom is compared to *snow* (5. 2. 4).

In both cases the description is surely poetical rather than literally accurate, yet it is sometimes concluded from this passage that Othello was a negro. Cp. the quotation from Steevens at the end of the scene.

71. **to fear, not to delight**, to an object of fear rather than to one of delight, as a lover ought surely to be.

72. **Judge me the world**, let the world be my judge.
gross in sense, easy to perceive, palpable to reason.

74. **delicate**, susceptible. **drugs or minerals**, *i.e.*, vegetable or mineral poisons. For "mineral" cp. 2. 1. 306.

75. **weaken motion**, subdue or impair the faculties.
disputed on, taken to law. *waken - stir up, excite*

77. **attach**, arrest. A legal term : cp. *Comedy of Errors*, 4. 4.1.6 :

I do attach thee by this officer.

78. **an abuser of the world**, a corrupter of the community. *Contaminator of Society*



Of arts inhibited and out of warrant.

Lay hold upon him ; if he do resist, 80

Subdue him at his peril.

Oth. Hold your hands,

Both you of my inclining, and the rest.

Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it

Without a prompter. Where will you that I go

To answer this your charge ?

Bra. To prison, till fit time

Of law, and course of direct session 86

Call thee to answer.

Oth. What if I do obey ?

How may the Duke be therewith satisfied,

Whose messengers are here about my side

Upon some present business of the state 90

To bring me to him ?

Off. 'Tis true, most worthy signior.

The Duke's in council ; and your noble self,

I am sure, is sent for.

79. **inhibited and out of warrant.** Both words =
"interdicted," "not permitted to be practised."

82. **of my inclining,** who incline to my side.

83-84. **my cae...without a prompter.** "The *cue* is properly the last expression in a dramatic speech, whereby the player who is to speak next knows his turn. In case of his memory failing him, it is the business of the *prompter* to remind him." (Hunter.)

86. **course of direct session,** the regular course of judicial proceedings.



Bra. How ! the Duke in council !

In this time of the night ! Bring him away ;
 Mine's not an idle cause. The Duke himself, 95
 Or any of my brothers of the state,
 Cannot but feel this wrong as 'twere their own ;
 For if such actions may have passage free,
 Bond-slaves and pagans shall our statesmen be.

Exeunt.

Scene III

[*A council-chamber.*]

The Duke and Senators set at a table, with light ;

Officers attending.

Duke. There is no composition in these news
 That gives them credit.

1 Sen. Indeed, they are disproportioned ;
 My letters say, a hundred and seven galleys.

98. may have passage free, are permitted to take place with impunity.

"If this Moor is now suffered to escape with impunity, it will be such an encouragement to his black countrymen, that we may expect to see all the first offices of state filled up by the pagans and bond-slaves of Africa."—Steevens.

1-301. The night of the elopement coincides with a critical moment in the history of the Venetian state, and in the scene we have now reached we witness the Duke and the senators gathered at this unusual hour to devise measures for averting the danger of a Turkish invasion

Duke. And mine, a hundred forty.

2 *Sen.* And mine, two hundred !

But though they jump not on a just account, 5

(As in these cases, where the aim reports,

'Tis oft with difference), yet do they all confirm

A Turkish fleet, and bearing up to Cyprus.

Duke. Nay, it is possible enough to judgement.

of the island of Cyprus. In the midst of their deliberations Brabantio arrives with Othello, Iago and Roderigo. The father accuses the Moor of having stolen his daughter from him by magical arts; but Othello, when put upon his defence, tells an unvarnished tale of how he won the maid's affections by simply relating to her the story of his life. The Duke takes the part of the Moor—and Desdemona, who appears at this point and confirms her husband's statement, is immediately disowned by her father.

The affairs of state are then proceeded with. Othello is put in command of Cyprus and consents to sail that very night. Desdemona, having obtained permission to follow him, is left behind in charge of Iago, who receives orders to bring her after in the best advantage.

1. **composition**, congruity, agreement.

2. **disproportion'd**, inconsistent.

3. **galleys**. Flat-blottomed boats driven by oars, used formerly in the Mediterranean.

5. **jump not on a just accompt**, do not exactly tally.

For "jump" in this sense cp. *Shrew*, 1. 1. 195 :

Both our inventions meet and *jump* in one.

"Just" has the same sense of "exact" again in 2. 3. 129, below. Cp. "a just pound;" *Merch. of Venice*, 4. 1. 327.

6. **where the aim reports**, where report is based upon *conjecture*.

7. **with difference**, with discrepancies like these.



I do not so secure me in the error
But the main article I do approve
In fearful sense.

10

Sailor. (*Within.*) What, ho ! what, ho ! What, ho !

Enter a Sailor.

Off. A messenger from the galleys.

Duke. Now, what's the business ?

Sail. The Turkish preparation makes for Rhodes ;

So was I bid report here to the state

15

By Signior Angelo.

Duke. How say you by this change ?

1 Sen. This cannot be,

By no assay of reason ; 'tis a pageant,

To keep us in false gaze. When we consider

10-11. **I do not...sense.** "I do not feel so over-confident on account of the error that may be in these reports, but that I can perceive ground for dread in the main particular" (Clarke). **fearful**=full of fear.

14. **preparation.** "a force or fleet equipped for fighting."

17. **How say you by this change?** What say you concerning this altered course ? Cp. "How say you by the French lord ?" *Merchant of Venice*, 1. 2. 58.

18. **by no assay of reason**, by any test of reason. Double negative. **a pageant**, a show, a pretence, a blind. The word properly means a theatrical exhibition.

19. **to keep us in false gaze**, to turn our attention to *Rhodes* when the real source of danger is at *Cyprus*.



The importancy of Cyprus to the Turk, 20
 And let ourselves again but understand
 That, as it more concerns the Turk than Rhodes,
 So may he with more facile question bear it,
 For that it stands not in such warlike brace,
 But altogether lacks the abilities 25
 That Rhodes is dress'd in ; if we make thought of this,
 We must not think the Turk is so unskilful
 To leave that latest which concerns him first,
 Neglecting an attempt of ease and gain
 To wake and wage a danger profitless. 30

Duke. Nay, in all confidence, he's not for Rhodes.

Offi. Here is more news.

Enter a Messenger.

Mess. The Ottomites, reverend and gracious,
 Steering with due course towards the isle of Rhodes,
 21. **And ... understand.** and again when we consider.
 23. **with more facile question bear it.** more easily
 carry (or capture) the island of Cyprus.
 24. **brace,** state of defence.
 25. **abilities,** capabilities of defence, means of resisting
 attack.
 30. **wake...profitless.** seek trouble for nothing by
 attacking an impregnable stronghold like Rhodes.
 31. **in all confidence,** without a doubt.
 33. **The Ottomites,** the Turks. **reverend and gra-**
cious : cp. 76-77, below.



Have there injoined them with an after fleet. 35

1 Sen. Ay, so I thought. How many, as you guess?

Mess. Of thirty sail; and now they do re-stem

Their backward course, bearing with frank appearance

Their purposes toward Cyprus. Signior Montano,

Your trusty and most valiant servitor, 40

With his free duty recommends you thus,

And prays you to believe him.

Duke. 'Tis certain, then, for Cyprus.

Marcus Luccieos, is not he in town?

1 Sen. He's now in Florence. 45

Duke. Write from us to him; post-post-haste dispatch.

1 Sen. Here comes Brabantio and the valiant Moor.

35. **injoined them**, joined themselves to. **an after fleet**, an auxiliary fleet sent in support of the first.

Knolles, in his *Historie of the Turks*, states that, by previous arrangement, one fleet was to wait for the other at Rhodes, and the two together to proceed to Cyprus, to besiege Nicosia, the chief city of the island.

37. **sail**, vessels under sail. Collective singular.

37-38. **re-stem their backward course**, *i.e.*, turn their prows eastwards. Cyprus is situated about 300 miles east of Rhodes.

39. **Signior Montano**. Othello's predecessor in the government of Cyprus.

41-42. **With...him**, pays his respects to the senators and begs them to accept this as true.

46. **post-post-haste**. See note on l. 2. 37, above.

*Enter Brabantio, Othello, Cassio, Iago, Roderigo,
and Officers.*

Duke. Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you
Against the general enemy Ottoman.

[*To Brabantio.*] I did not see you; welcome, gentle
signior; 50

We lack'd your counsel and your help to-night.

Bra. So did I yours. Good your Grace, pardon me;

Neither my place nor aught I heard of business

Hath rais'd me from my bed, nor doth the general care

Take hold on me; for my particular grief 55

Is of so flood-gate and o'erbearing nature

48. **Valiant Othello, ... employ you.** The fact of his being of alien race would be no disqualification, but rather a recommendation, in the eyes of the Venetians.

"By land they are served of strangers, both for generals, for captains, and for all other men of war; because their law permitted not any Venetian to be captain over an army by land, fearing, I think, Caesar's example." *Thomas's History of Italy.*

49. **general**, public. So in 54, below.

50. **I did not see you.** The Duke apologizes to Brabantio for omitting to greet him.

55. **particular**, private, personal.

Cp. *Lear* 5. 1. 30: "Domestic and particular brawls."

56. **flood-gate**, torrential. He compares his grief to a stream of rushing water.

Spenser uses "flood-gate" as a noun = strong stream, torrent:

Out of her gored wound the cruell steele,

He lightly snatcht, and did the *flood-gate* stop.

That it engluts and swallows other sorrows
And it is still itself.

Duke. Why, what's the matter?

Bra. My daughter! O, my daughter!

Sen. Dead?

Bra. Ay, to me;

She is abus'd, stolen from me, and corrupted 60

By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;

For nature so preposterously to err,

(Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,)

Sans witchcraft could not.

Duke. Whoe'er he be that in this foul proceeding 65

Hath thus beguil'd your daughter of herself

57. **engluts** (French *engloutir*) is repeated in **swallows**.

61. **medicines**. philtres. **mountebanks**=charlatans
or quacks.

63. **lame of sense**, Cp. "It is a judgment *maim'd*," (99
below); "of"=in respect of.

64. **Sans witchcraft could not**, *without* the aid of
witchcraft could not have come to pass. The French word
"sans" is used almost like an English word in Shakespeare:
Cp. *As You like It*, 2. 7. 165.

Sans teeth, *sans* eyes, *sans* taste, *sans* everything.

This is now the third time that Brabantio has accused Othello of
using unlawful arts to win his daughter's affections.—It will be
remembered that Falstaff facetiously makes this charge against Prince
Hal: "I am bewitched with the rogue's company. If the rascal has not
given me medicines to make me love him, I'll be hanged. It could
not be else. I have drunk medicines." *1 Henry IV*, 2. 2. 18.

66. **beguil'd.....of her**, bereft your daughter of her
senses, and stolen her from you.



And you of her, the bloody book of law
 You shall yourself read in the bitter letter
 After your own sense, yea, though our proper son
 Stood in your action.

Bra. Humbly I thank your Grace.
 Here is the man,—this Moor, whom now, it seems, 71
 Your special mandate for the state affairs
 Hath hither brought.

All. We are very sorry for't.

Duke. [*To Othello.*] What, in your own part, can you say
 to this?

Bra. Nothing, but this is so. 75

Oth. Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors,
 My very noble and approv'd good masters,
 That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter,
 It is most true; true, I have married her:

67. **bloody**, severe, rigorous. The laws of Draco were said to have been written in blood.

Furness quotes a contemporary statute to the effect that persons convicted of provoking unlawful love by witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery might be sentenced to a year's imprisonment.

68-69. **read...sense**, interpret in the most literal way you please. **our proper son**, my own son. **Stood in your action**, was defendant in the case.

71. **Here is the man**. He points to Othello as he says the words, and all the senators are filled with amazement.

74. **in your own part**, on behalf of yourself.

77. **approv'd**, put to the proof, trusted.



The very head and front of my offending 80
 Hath this extent, no more. Rude am I in my speech,
 And little bless'd with the soft phrase of peace ;
 For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith
 Till now, some nine moons wasted, they have us'd
 Their dearest action in the tented field ; 85
 And little of this great world can I speak
 More than pertains to feats of broils and battle,
 And therefore little shall I grace my cause
 In speaking for myself. Yet, by your gracious patience,
 I will a round unvarnish'd tale deliver . 90
 Of my whole course of love ; what drugs, what charms,
 What conjuration and what mighty magic,
 (For such proceeding I am charg'd withal,)

80. **the very head and front of my offending**, the *gravamen*, the worst part of the accusation brought against me.

81. **no more**, *i.e.*, what Brabantio has said about malpractice is moonshine.

82. **Rude**, unrefined, unpolished.

83. **since ... pith**, *i.e.*, since my seventh year : (" pith " = " vigour. ")

84. **Till ... wasted**, till some nine months ago.

85. **dearest action**, their best or most serious exertion.
tented, tent-covered.

86. **speak**, speak *about*. 87. **broils**, turmoils, tumults.

90. **round unvarnish'd**, plain and straightforward.

92. **what mighty magic**. Ironical.

93. **withal**. The usual form of " with " at the end of a clause or sentence.



I won his daughter.

Bra.

A maiden never bold ;

Of spirit so still and quiet, that her motion 95

Blush'd at herself ; and she, in spite of nature,

Of years, of country, credit, everything,

To fall in love, with what she feared to look on !

It is a judgement maim'd and most imperfect,

That will confess perfection so could err 100

Against all rules of nature ; and must be driven

To find out practices of cunning hell,

Why this should be. I therefore vouch again,

That with some mixture powerful o'er the blood,

Or with some dram conjur'd to this effect, 105

He wrought upon her.

95-96. **her motion Blush'd at herself.** The point of these words seems to be that Desdemona is still a mere girl—at least in her father's eyes—and has not learned to control her blushing.

In this respect she resembles other heroines of Shakespeare, e.g., Isabella (see *All's Well*, 1. 3. 182, 2. 3. 75) and Hero (*Much Ado*, 4. 1. 161): "A thousand blushing apparitions...a thousand innocent shames."

98. **what she fear'd to look on.** So no doubt her father thought, but for the truth about the matter we must see 3. 3. 206-208.

100. **confess, maintain. perfection, simplicity and ingenuousness like hers.**

and must be driven, and a right judgement is driven.

105. **dram, dose. conjur'd to this effect,** charmed to produce this contemplated result.



Duke. To vouch this is no proof,

Without more wider and more overt test
Than these thin habits and poor likelihoods
Of modern seeming do prefer against him.

I Sen. But, Othello, speak : 110

Did you by indirect and forced courses
Subdue and poison this young maid's affections ?
Or come it by request, and such fair question
As soul to soul affordeth ?

Oth. I do beseech you,

Send for the lady to the Sagittary, 115
And let her speak of me before her father :
If you do find me foul in her report,
The trust, the office I do hold of you,
Not only take away, but let your sentence
Even fall upon my life.

107. **more wider.** For the double comparative cp. "more nearer earth," (5. 2. 110, below). **more overt tests.** plainer proofs.

109. **thin habits** has the same meaning as **poor likelihoods.**

Literally "habit" = dress, garb, but figuratively (as here) = outward show.

110. **modern**, paltry, trumpery. The word is always used in this disparaging sense in Shakespeare. **prefer**, bring forward.

111. **indirect and forced courses**, underhand and violent proceedings.

113. **question**, colloquy, conversation.

117. **foul**, guilty of foul play.

Duke.

Fetch Desdemona hither. 120

Exeunt two or three.

Oth. Ancient, conduct them ; you best know the place.

[*Exit Iago.*]

And, till she come, as truly as to heaven

I do confess the vices of my blood,

So justly to your grave ears I'll present

How I did thrive in this fair lady's love, 125

And she in mine.

Duke. Say it, Othello.

Oth. Her father lov'd me ; oft invited me ;

Still question'd me the story of my life

122-124. **as truly... So justly.** In saying these words he (so to speak) puts himself under an oath that he will utter nothing but the truth. **the vices of my blood**, the depravity of my nature ; my hot, ungovernable passions.

124. **present**, set forth, describe.

128-170. This is one of the most famous speeches in Shakespeare, and has earned for Othello the renown of being "the noblest man of man's making" (Swinburne). It is first and foremost a reply to Brabantio's charge that Othello had made use of sorcery to gain his daughter's affection. The history here summarised could be expanded into volumes. Observe the artlessness of the narrative and its entire freedom from bravado. The hero is silent on the subject of his royal descent. There is nothing said about *exploits*, but much about *dangers*. We are at no loss to understand the Duke's exclamation at the close :

I think this tale would win my daughter too.

These simple words surely contain the greatest tribute to Othello to be found in the play.

129. **still**, always : cp. 147, below. **question'd me the story**, ask me to relate the story. 130. **fortunes**, adventures.



From year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes,
That I have pass'd. 131

I ran it through, even from my boyish days,
To the very moment that he bade me tell it;
Wherein I spoke of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field, 135

Of hair-breadth scapes i' the imminent deadly breach,
Of being taken by the insolent foe
And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence,
And portance in my travel's history; *in relating*
Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle, 140
Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch
heaven,

It was my hint to speak,—such was my process—
And of the Cannibals that each other eat,

135. **accidents**, incidents, as in 1. 1. 143. **flood and field**, sea and land. Othello is as much a sailor as a soldier.

136. **the imminent deadly breach**, the gap in the fortification made by the besiegers; the storm-centre of danger in an assault.

139. **portance**, bearing, behaviour. **my travel's history**, the *course* of my travels.

140. **antres**, "romantic caverns" (Lamb). Latin *antrum*. **idle**, barren, sterile.

It was my hint, I had occasion. **my process**, my narrative, my story.

Cp. *Hamlet*, 1. 5. 37, "A forged process of my death," and *Merch. of Venice*, 4. 1. 274:

Tell her the process of Antonio's end.



(The Anthropophagi), and men whose heads
 Do grow beneath their shoulders. This to hear 145
 Would Desdemona seriously incline ;
 But still the house-affairs would draw her thence,
 Which ever as she could with baste dispatch,
 She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
 Devour up my discourse : which I observing, 150
 Took once a pliant hour, and found good means
 To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart
 That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,
 Whereof by parcels she had something heard,
 But not intentively. I did consent, 155
 And often did beguile her of her tears

144. **The Anthropophagi.** A Greek word = man-eaters.
men whose heads...shoulders.

Tales of these tribes were common in the books of travel of Shakespeare's time : they are alluded to again in *The Tempest* (3. 3. 46) :

... or that there were such men

Whose heads stood in their breasts.

Raleigh, in his *Discoverie of Guiana*, 1596, mentions the Amazons, the Cannibals, and the "nation of people whose heads appear not above their shoulders." So Hakluyt, in his *Voyages*, 1598, speaks of a people "whose heads appear not above their shoulders : they are reported to have their eyes in their shoulders, and their mouths in the middle of their breasts."

a pliant hour, when she was rapt in his story and seemed likely to give him a favourable answer.

153. **dilate**, tell in detail.

154. **by parcels**, here a little, there a little. (Latin *particella*, dim. of *pars*, a part.)

155. **not intentively**, not in a consecutive story.

Enter Desdemona, Iago, and Attendants.

Duke. I think this tale would win my daughter too.

Good Brabantio,

Take up this mangled matter at the best ;

Men do their broken weapons rather use

Than their bare hands.

Bra. I pray you, hear her speak.

If she confess that she was half the wooer, 175

Destruction on my head, if my bad blame

Light on the man ! Come hither, gentle mistress,

Do you perceive in all this noble company

Where most you owe obedience ?

Des. My noble father,

I do perceive here a divided duty. 180

To you I am bound for life and education ;

My life and education both do learn me

173. **Take up at the best**, make the best you can of this business, try to arrange matters amicably with your son-in-law.

With this use of "take up" = "arrange" cp. *Twelfth Night*, 3. 4. 320 :
"I have his horse to *take up* the quarrel."

181. **a divided duty** : because the time has come when Desdemona the daughter must be Desdemona the wife. Cp. Cordelia's reply to her father, when he claims from her the whole of her affection (*Lear*, 1. 1. 102) :

Haply, when I shall wed,

That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry

Half my love with him, half my care and duty.

183. **learn me**, teach me.

This use of "learn," now confined to the vulgar, occurs about 10 times in Shakespeare.

How to respect you ; you are the lord of duty ;
I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my hus-
band ;

185

And so much duty as my mother show'd
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor, my lord.

Bra. God be with you ! I have done.

Please it your Grace, on to the state-affairs. 190

I had rather to adopt a child than get it.

Come hither, Moor.

I here do give thee that with all my heart.

Which, but thou hast already, with all my heart

I would keep from thee. For your sake, jewel,

195

I am glad at soul I have no other child ;

185. I am hitherto your daughter, I have been your daughter up to the present.

188. challenge, claim,—as in 2. 1. 213.

189. God be with you, good-bye. An ironical benediction.

191. get, beget. 194. but (that) thou hast already.

195. jewel. Ironical.

Cp. Cordelia's parting words to Goneril and Regan (*Lear*, 1. 1. 271) :

The jewels of our father, fare you well !

196. no other child, i.e., no other daughter.

In the midland counties of England "child" is still used in the restricted sense of "female child, girl" (See Mrs. E. M. Wright's *Rustic Speech*, p. 79). We find this provincialism in *Winter's Tale*, 3. 3. 70 : "Mercy on's, a barne ; a very pretty barne ! A boy or a child, I wonder?" Almost as clear a case (never pointed out, as far as we know) occurs in *Lear*, 1. 2. 118-121 : "There's son [Edgar] against father, ... there's father against child [Cordelia]."

For thy escape would teach me tyranny,
To hang clogs on them. I have done, my lord.

Duke. Let me speak like yourself, and lay a sentence,

Which, as a grise or step, may help these lovers 200
[Into your favour].

When remedies are past, the griefs are ended
By seeing the worst, which late on hopes depended.

To mourn a mischief that is past and gone

Is the next way to draw new mischief on. 205

What cannot be preserv'd when fortune takes,

Patience her injury a mockery makes.

198. **clogs.** A clog is a block of wood used to hobble animals.

199. **speak like yourself,** speak as you yourself would speak were you not too much heated with passion. **lay, lay down.** **a sentence,** a sententious saying, a maxim.

200. **grise,** has the same meaning as **step.** (Latin *gressus*; Old French *gré.*)

202. **When remedies are past,** etc., cp. *Love's Labour's Lost*, 5. 2. 28: "Past cure is still past care." **on hopes depended,** were subject to the fluctuations of hope.

205. **the next way,** the readiest means.

Hart quotes a parallel saying from Caxton's *Reynard the Fox*: "He that will seek harm, shall find harm."

206-207. The syntactical order is, Patience makes a mockery (of) her injury. **her injury,** the injury she suffers. **a mockery,** a laughing matter.

The meaning is that the patient man makes as light as possible of inevitable misfortunes.

The evil is done & it cannot be undone so he'd minimise it. At the same time he'd



suffers little wrong for the thing
 The robb'd that smiles steals something from the
 thief;

does an injustice to himself
 He robs himself that spends a bootless grief.

Let not sorrow eat me
heart
 Bra. So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile; 210.

We lose it not, so long as we can smile.

X (He bears the sentence well that nothing bears

But the free comfort which from thence he hears,

But he bears both the sentence and the sorrow *original sorrow*

That, to pay Grief, must of poor Patience borrow. 215

These sentences, to sugar, or to gall,

Being strong on both sides, are equivocal:

But words are words; I never yet did hear

208. **steals something**, viz., the satisfaction of making him suffer.

209. **bootless**, unavailing.

212. **sentence**: has the same meaning as in 199 above, and 216, below.

213. **free comfort**, gratuitously given consolation.

When people give advice and sympathy where it is not wanted, too often, like Job's comforters, they aggravate the misery they seek to alleviate. So Brabantio uses "to bear" (= "to suffer") as applicable alike to his deeply-felt sorrow and to the "sentences" which are given to console him.

216-217. **These sentences...equivocal**. "These sentences (or maxims) strong on both sides, have doubtful sense, they are equal either to sugar or to gall" (Hart).

"Equivocal" is used in its older sense of "having two (or more) significations equally applicable to the case in point."

218. **But words are words**. Cp. *Troilus and Cressida*, 5. 3. 103:

Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart.

The effect doth operate another way.

It is easy for a man who has not suffered anything to follow
gratuitously.



That the bruis'd heart was pierced through the ear.

I humbly beseech you, proceed to the affairs of state.

220.

Duke. The Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for Cyprus. Othello, the fortitude of the place is best known to you; and though we have there a substitute of most allowed sufficiency, yet opinion, a sovereign mistress of effects, throws a more safer voice on you. You must therefore be content to slubber the gloss of your new fortunes with this more stubborn and boisterous expedition.

219. bruis'd, stricken, wounded. pierced, reached, penetrated, and therefore consoled.

220. I humbly, etc.

"This sudden change from verse to prose indicates a transition, correspondingly sudden, from theoretical moralizing and epigrammatic banter to the practical demands of the moment." Delius.

221. preparation. Cp. line 14, above.

222. fortitude, strength. This is the only place where Shakespeare uses the word with reference to structural strength.

224. a substitute, deputy, governor. Allowed sufficiency, acknowledged ability.

225-226. opinion, public opinion. a sovereign mistress of effects, the supreme judge in the sphere of practical realities. throws...upon you, reputes you to be the better man for this emergency. more safer. Double comparative.

227. slubber the gloss, sully the freshness.



SCENE III] THE MOOR OF VENICE

51

Oth. The tyrant custom, most grave senators, 230

Hath made the flinty and steel couch of war

My thrice-driven bed of down. I do agnize

A natural and prompt alacrity

I find in hardness, and do undertake

These present wars against the Ottomites. 235

Most humbly therefore bending to your state,

I crave fit disposition for my wife,

Due reference of place and exhibition,

With such accommodation and besort

The metaphor is from the soiling of new garments. Cp. *Much Ado*, 3. 2. 6: "Nay, that would be as great a soil in the new gloss of your marriage as to show a child his new coat and forbid him to wear it."

231. **flinty and steel couch of war.** "The soldier's bed is so called because he often lies down in his armour with his head on a stone." (Macmillan.)

232. **the thrice-driven bed of down,** the softest feather bed.

"A driven bed," says Johnson, "is a bed for which the feathers are selected with a fan which separates the light from the heavy."

agnize, acknowledge, avow. Latin *agnosco*; the root is Lat. & Gk. *gno*, Skt. *jna*.

234. **hardness**, hardship, privation. The word has this sense in 2 *Timothy*, 2. 3: "Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

236. **bending to your state**, bowing before you in homage to your greatness.

237. **disposition**, arrangements.

238. **reference**, assignment.

Othello specifies four things: (1) **place**=place of residence; (2) **exhibition**,=allowance of money; (3) **accommodation**, conveniences; (4) **besort**, attendance, companionship.



(As levels with her breeding. *in keeping with her social rank & position*)

Duke.

If you please, 240

Be it at her father's.

Bra.

I'll not have it so.

Oth. Nor I.

Des.

Nor I; I would not there reside.

To put my father in impatient thoughts

By being in his eye. Most gracious Duke,

To my unfolding lend your prosperous ear;

245

And let me find a charter in your voice,

To assist my simpleness. *help my simplicity by your reasoning manner*

Duke. What would you, Desdemona?

Des. That I did love the Moor to live with him, *goes*

Othello's loving care for his wife is shown in the concern he here manifests for her creature comforts.

240. **levels with her breeding**, befits her gentle upbringing. 243. **in**, into.

245. **my unfolding**, what I will now unfold. **your prosperous ear**, a favourable hearing.

246. **a charter**, a guarantee, an assurance.

247. **simpleness**, inexperience.

249-260. On this speech Mrs. Cowden-Clarke writes:

"Desdemona is gentle even to timidity; but, like many women whose gentleness of nature has been wrought into timidity by a too rigid strictness on the part of those who bring them up, she is capable of singularly bold action and self-assertion on rare occasions. Her independent act in leaving her father's house and marrying the man of her choice, is precisely characteristic of the one, and her present speech is an eminent specimen of the other."



My downright violence and storm of fortunes 250

May trumpet to the world. My heart's subdu'd *to be captured*

Even to the very quality of my lord.

I saw Othello's visage in his mind, *the beautiful nobleness image*

And to his honours and his valiant parts

Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate. *I am I have dedicate* 255

So that, dear lords, if I be left behind,

A moth of peace, and he go to the war, *endure all the*

The rites for which I love him are bereft me, *services + we be deprived of the highest privilege hardships*

250. **My downright...fortunes**, "the bold action I have taken, and the stormy fortunes I have voluntarily encountered in order to marry Othello."

252. **the very quality of my lord**. "The 'very quality' distinctive of Othello was the colour of his visage, and to that, *even to that*, Desdemona would trumpet to the world, her heart was subdued" (Furness).

253. **I saw...mind**. Desdemona interpreted the outward through the inward, the former being the manifestation and embodiment of the latter. Othello's face was beautiful to her because it was the expression of a beautiful soul.

Christopher North, who regards Othello as a veritable negro, interprets the line differently: the visible form, he says, was hideous, and only to be endured by losing sight of it; and he asks Desdemona's admirers to try to conceive the immensity of the love that was equal to such a task.

254. **his valiant parts**. For "parts," see 1. 2. 31, note.

257. **A moth of peace**, a woman who leads an aimless, do-nothing existence.

258. **rites**, ministrations, services (the performance of which she considers a privilege). **bereft me**, taken from me.

My heart was taken captive by the honourable attainment
"The quality in the sense of distinctive feature"
"The quality in the sense of distinctive feature"

And I a heavy interim shall support

• By his dear absence. Let me go with him.

260

Oth. Let her have your voices.

• Vouch with me, Heaven, I therefore beg it not

To please the palate of my appetite,

Nor to comply with heat (the young affects

In me defunct) and proper satisfaction,

265

But to be free and bounteous to her mind);

And Heaven defend your good souls, that you think

I will your serious and great business scant

When she is with me. No, when light-wing'd toys

Of feather'd Cupid seel with wanton dullness

270

My speculative and offic'd instruments

259. **interim**, interval. 260. **dear**, deeply felt, dire.

261. **your voices**, your consent or approval.

262. **Vouch with me**, bear witness to my words.

264-265. **the young...defunct**, the passions of youth which I have outlived. **affects**=affections, passions. **proper**, natural.

267. **defend...that you think**, forbid that you should think.

268. **scant**, neglect, treat slightly.

269-270. **light-wing'd toys Of...Cupid**. "Toys" often="trifles"; and here=Cupid's arrows, equivalent to love fancies. Cp. *Love's Labours Lost*, 4. 3. 22: "the bird-bolts of the god of love."

feather'd=winged: (Cp. "*feather'd Mercury*," 1 Henry IV, 4. 1. 106): **seel** is a term in falconry=close up the eyes—see note on 3. 3. 210.

271. **My...instruments**, "my organs of sight, charged with official responsibility" (Hunter).

indulgence in pleasure
 That my disports corrupt and taint my business,
 Let housewives make a skillet of my helm,
 And all indign and base adversities *dullness arising from no*
 Make head against my estimation ! *indulgence* 275 *war*

Prevail
against a variable
me to
me to
 Duke. Be it as you shall privately determine,
 Either for her stay or going. The affair cries haste,
 And speed must answer it.

1 Sen. You must away to-night.

[*Des.* To-night, my lord ?

Duke. This night.]

Oth. With all my heart.

Duke. At nine i' the morning here we'll meet again. 280

Othello, leave some officer behind,
 And he shall our commission bring to you,
 And such things else of quality and respect
 As doth import you.

Oth. So please your Grace, my ancient ;
 A man he is of honesty and trust. 285

272. **That**, so that, insomuch that. **disports**, sports.
 pastimes.

273. **a skillet**, a camp kettle. This word still survives
 among the Warwickshire peasantry.

274. **indign**, unworthy, disgraceful.

275. **Make head against**, war against. **my estimation**,
 my reputation.

277. **cries**, calls loudly for, demands.

282. **commission**, warrant conferring authority. Cp.
 "in full commission," 2. 1. 19.

283. **such things...import you**, other honours and
 titles that will assure you the respect due to your rank.



To his conveyance I assign my wife,
 With what else needful your good Grace shall think
 To be sent after me.

Duke.

Let it be so.

Good-night to every one. [*To Bra.*] And, noble
 signior,

If virtue no delighted beauty lack, 290

Your son-in-law is far more fair than black.

1 Sen. Adieu, brave Moor; use Desdemona well.

Bra. Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see;

She has deceiv'd her father, and may thee.

Exeunt [Duke, Senators, Officers, etc.].

Oth. My life upon her faith! Honest Iago, 295

My Desdemona must I leave to thee.

I prithee, let thy wife attend on her;

286. **conveyance**, escort, conduct, direction

287. **needful...think**, think needful.

290. **delighted**, delightful, capable of giving delight.

The passive form is used with an active meaning.

"If virtue comprehends everything in itself, then your virtuous son-in-law is, of course, beautiful; he has that beauty which delights everyone" (Steevens).

294. **She has deceived...and may thee.** These ominous words dimly foreshadow the tragic issues of a union upon which, from its outset, there lies the heavy load of a father's malediction.

Coleridge observes here: "In real life, how do we look back to little speeches as presentimental of, or contrasted with, an affecting event! Even so Shakespeare, as secure of being read over and over, of becoming a family friend, provides this passage for his readers, and leaves it to them."



And bring them after; in the best advantage.
 Come, Desdemona ; I have but an hour
 Of love, of worldly matters and direction, 300
 To spend with thee. We must obey the time.

Exeunt Othello and Desdemona.

Rod. Iago,—

Iago. What say'st thou, noble heart ?

Rod. What will I do, think'st thou ?

Iago. Why, go to bed, and sleep. 305

Rod. I will incontinently drown myself.

Iago. If thou dost, I shall never love thee after.

Why, thou silly gentleman !

Rod. It is silliness to live when to live is torment :
 and then have we a prescription to die when 310
 Death is our physician.

Iago. O villanous ! I have look'd upon the world
 for four times seven years ; and since I could

298. **in the best advantage**, at the most favourable opportunity.

302-388. The senators and others now withdraw, leaving Iago and Roderigo in possession of the stage. The love-thwarted and love-sick Roderigo wishes to put an end to his life, but Iago points out to him the unlikelihood of Desdemona continuing to love Othello, a man much older than herself and of a different race—"It was a violent commencement in her, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration." Buoying up his hopes in this way, Iago persuades his foolish dupe to put money into his purse and follow the fortunes of love and war.

306. **incontinently**, immediately.

310-311. **prescription...physician**. Note the quibble between these two words.

313. **four times seven years**. "That Iago should be no more than twenty-eight years old, and yet so versed in worldly ways,

distinguish betwixt a benefit and an injury, I
 never found man that knew how to love himself. 315
 Ere I would say I would drown myself for love
 of a guinea-hen, I would change my humanity
 with a baboon.

so decided in his opinions, so competent in stratagem, so expert in turning the worthiest as well as the weakest points of human nature to his purpose, so utterly without faith in goodness as he is, makes him the more an innate villain. He is a hard, cold-blooded almost vivacious scoundrel, from inherent disposition, who uses his keen intellect with the same fierce joy in its skill and power to destroy that he uses his sharp dagger or sword" (Clarke).

317. **a guinea-hen.** A domestic fowl originally imported from Guinea on the west coast of Africa. It is familiarly known as "Come-back" from its peculiar cry and appears to have been a cant term for a woman of easy virtue.

"The hardest part of Iago's practice on Roderigo is to engage him in a criminal quest of Desdemona. At first Roderigo hoped her father would break off the match with Othello, so that she might still be open to an honest solicitation; but when he found her married, and the marriage allowed by Brabantio, he was for giving up in despair. But again Iago besets him like an evil angel and plies his witchcraft with augmented vigour. Himself an utter atheist of female virtue, his cue is to debauch Roderigo with his own atheism. He therefore at the same time flatters his pride by urging the power of money, and inflames his passion by urging the frailty of woman; as knowing that the greatest preventive of dishonourable passion is faith in the virtue of its object. Throughout the undertaking, Iago's passionless soul revels amid lewd thoughts and images, like a spirit broke loose from the pit. With his nimble fancy, his facility and felicity of combination, fertile, fluent, and apposite in plausibilities, he literally overwhelms the poor fellow's power of resistance." Hudson.



Rod. What should I do? I confess it is my shame
to be so fond, but it is not in my virtue to
amend it. 320

Iago. Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are
thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the
which our wills are gardeners; so that if we will
plant nettles, or sow lettuce, set hyssop and 325
weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of
herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it
sterile with idleness, or manured with industry,
why, the power and corrigible authority of this
lies in our wills. If the balance of our lives 330
had not one scale of reason to poise another of
sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures
would conduct us to most preposterous conclu-

318. **change...baboon**, change my nature for a monkey's.
To Iago, love is merely the appetite of a baboon.

320. **fond**, infatuated about Desdemona. **virtue**, power.

322. **Virtue**! Iago takes up the word in the other sense
of "chastity" and mocks at the very idea. **a fig**! An
exclamation accompanied by a contemptuous gesture.

325-327. **set**, set out, plant in rows. **weed up**, uproot.
gender, genus, kind. **distract**, diversify, variegate.

328. **sterile with idleness**, barren from want of hus-
bandry. **manured**, cultivated.

. This word is a doublet of "manœuvre": both have the etymolo-
gical sense of "work by the hand" (Latin *manu operari*). .

329. **corrigible**, corrective. Cp. the note on "delighted,"
290, above.

331. **poise**, counterpoise, counterbalance.

sions ; but we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts, 335 whereof I take this that you call love to be a set or scion.

Rod. It cannot be.

Iago. It is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will. Come, be a man. Drown 340 thyself ! drown cats and blind puppies. I have profess'd me thy friend, and I confess me knit to thy deserving with cables of perdurable toughness ; I could never better stead thee than now. Put money in thy purse ; follow thou the wars ; 345 defeat thy favour with an usurp'd beard. I say put money in thy purse. It cannot be long that

334-336. **raging**, ungovernable, **carnal stings**, sensual impulses. **unbitted**, unbridled.

337. **a set**, a sucker or slip ready for setting out or planting ; a word used in familiar speech for **scion**.

¶ " Set " is Johnson's correction of the Folio " sect," a word not used at all in horticulture.]

342. **knit...toughness**. Cp. Polonius' famous advice to his son Laertes (Hamlet, 1. 3. 63) :

The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel.

These " cables of perdurable toughness " are of course nothing else but Roderigo's purse-strings mentioned in the first speech of the play.

344. **stead thee**, be of service to you.

345. **Put money in thy purse**. With this often-quoted advice of Iago's cp. *Merry Wives*, 2. 2. 175 : " They say, if money go before, all ways do lie open."

346. **defeat...beard**, disguise your face by wearing a false beard.

Desdemona should continue her love to the Moor,
—put money in thy purse,—nor he his to her. It
was a violent commencement in her, and thou 350
shalt see an answerable sequestration. Put but
money in thy purse. These Moors are changeable
in their wills ;—fill thy purse with money ;—the
food that to him now is as luscious as locusts,
shall be to him shortly as bitter as coloquintida. 355
She must change for youth ; when she is sated

350. and thou shalt see...sequestration, i.e., their
falling in love was violent, and their falling out of love
will be the same.

“ What does Iago mean by ‘ sequestration ’ ? No doubt the main
part of his meaning is the natural and right meaning of separa-
tion, ‘ divorce.’ But the sentence is antithetically constructed, and
‘ sequestration’ serves well enough, from its accidental suggestion of
‘ sequence ’ and ‘ sequel,’ to set over against ‘ commencement.’ This
is not a scholar’s use of language ; but it has a magic of its own.”
Raleigh, *Shakespeare*, p. 219.

354. luscious, sweet to excess. locusts, sugar-candy,
“ lollipops.”

Half-a-dozen not very convincing explanations of this word are
brought together in Furness’s *Variorum*. But here, as in so
many instances, the real key to Shakespeare’s meaning is probably
to be found in existing dialectical usage. In some English
counties (enumerated in Onions’s *Glossary*) “ locust ” is used to-day
in the sense of “ sugar-candy,” and the homeliness of this meaning
is surely no objection to its adoption here.

355. coloquintida, the bitter-apple, a familiar ingredi-
ent in pills.

356. she must change for youth she must get a
younger lover.

with his body, she will find the error of her choice ; [she must have change, she must :] therefore put money in thy purse. If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more delicate way 360 than drowning. Make all the money thou canst. If sanctimony and a frail vow betwixt an erring barbarian and a supersubtle Venetian be not too hard for my wits and all the tribe of hell, thou shalt enjoy her ; therefore make money. A pox 365 of drowning thyself ! it is clean out of the way.

Iago has just said that Othello will soon tire of Desdemona, because he is a Moor (352) : he now says that Desdemona will soon tire of Othello, because she is so very much younger than he.

359. **If thou wilt needs damn thyself**, *i.e.*, drown thyself, which was supposed to be wilfully to seek one's own damnation. See *Hamlet*, 5. 1. 2.

361. **a more delicate way**, *viz.*, by corrupting Desdemona.

362-363. **sanctimony**, a mere *affectation* of saintliness. But see 2. 1. 254-255. **a frail vow**, the marriage vow. With "frail" contrast *Julius Cæsar*, 2. 1. 272 :—

By that great vow

Which did incorporate and make us one...

erring, errant, having no settled abode.

363-364. **supersubtle**, supremely subtle, a past mistress of cunning. **too hard to loosen**. He is thinking of the marriage *knot*. **and all the tribe of hell**. These he reckons as allies.

This suggests in Iago something of the Mephistopheles of German legend, to whom Dr. Faust sold his soul.

365. **clean out of the way**, quite uncalled for, utterly absurd.



Seek thou rather to be hang'd in compassing thy joy than to be drown'd and go without her.

Rod. Wilt thou be fast to my hopes, if I depend on the issue ?

370

Iago. Thou art sure of me. Go, make money. I have told thee often, and I re-tell thee again and again, I hate the Moor. My cause is hearted ; thine hath no less reason. Let us be conjunctive in our revenge against him. If thou canst cuckold him, thou dost thyself a pleasure, me a sport. There are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered. Traverse! go, provide thy money. We will have more of this to-morrow. Adieu.

375

380

Rod. When shall we meet i' the morning ?

Iago. At my lodging.

Rod. I'll be with thee betimes.

Iago. Go to ; farewell. Do you hear, Roderigo ?

385

Rod. What say you ?

Iago. No more of drowning, do you hear ?

Rod. I am chang'd ; I'll go sell all my land.

Exit.

367. **compassing thy joy.** Cp. the punning use of "compass" in *Comedy of Errors*, 4. 1. 111.

373. **hearted**, rooted down in my heart.

374. **conjunctive**, in partnership.

375. **cuckold him**, make his wife false to him.

"A cuckold is one, as it were, *cuckooed* : gulled like the hedge-sparrow, whose nest has been invaded by the *cuckoo*. See Worcester's speech in *1 K. Henry IV*, (5. 1. 30-32) and the cuckoo song at the end of *Love's Labours Lost*." Hunter.

379. **Traverse!** March, move on. A military word of command.

Iago. Thus do I ever make my fool my purse ;
 For I mine own gain'd knowledge should profane, 390
 If I would time expend with such a snipe
 But for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor ;
 And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
 He has done my office. I know not if 't be true ;
 But I, for mere suspicion in that kind, 395

389-409. *Iago's first soliloquy.* "He plays before others so hypocritical a part, with such intense a falseness, that it is a great relief to be true in solitary speech, and to chuckle over his own cleverness in lying. And here he smiles as he engenders his plot to make the Moor jealous of Cassio and Desdemona, to get Cassio's place, and to feed fat his envious hatred of Othello." Stopford Brooke.

389. "You find Iago clutching avariciously at Roderigo's purse-strings, before you discover him plucking remorselessly at Othello's heart-strings."—Turnbull.

391. **A snipe**, *i.e.*, a simpleton.

"*Woodcock* is the term generally used by Shakespeare to denote an insignificant fellow; but Iago is more sarcastic, and compares his dupe to a smaller and meaner bird of almost the same shape." (Steevens.)

393. **abroad**, about in the world, in public.

394. **I know not if't be true.** "Certainly," writes Christopher North, "it was false. High characters, as Coriolanus, Hotspur, Othello, are, by a native majesty of spirit, saved and exalted from the pursuit of illicit pleasure."

395. **for mere suspicion...for surety**, Though actuated by mere suspicion, I will act as if I was certain.

"For" in both these instances is used in the sense of "from."

Will do as if for surety. He holds me well ;
 The better shall my purpose work on him.
 Cassio's a proper man : let me see now :
 To get him place and to plume up my will
 In double knavery—How, how ?—Let's see :— 400
 After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
 That he is too familiar with his wife.
 He hath a person and a smooth dispose
 To be suspected, fram'd to make women false.
 The Moor is of a free and open nature, 405
 That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
 And will as tenderly be led by the nose
 As asses are.

396. **He holds me well**, he has a high opinion of me,
 I am to him "the honest Iago."

398. **a proper man**, a handsome fellow. Cassio's
 comeliness makes Iago ugly in his own eyes. See 5. 1, 19-20.

399. **to plume up my will in double knavery**. To
 "plume up" = to trick out as with *feathers*. To do an act of
 knavery will be a feather in Iago's cap, a thing to exult in!

401. **abuse**, deceive, delude. This obsolete sense
 survives in the counter-term "disabuse" = "undeceive."

403. **a person**, a bodily figure.

Cp. "Bottom hath simply...the best *person*...in Athens." *Mids. N.*
Dream, 4. 2. 12.

dispose, disposition, temperament.

405. **free**, unsuspecting.

408. **as tenderly...as asses are** : *i.e.*, with as little
 resistance.

So Tartuffe, in Moliere's great play of that name, calls Oragon "a
 man to be led by the nose."



I have't. It is engend'red. Hell and night 409
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.
Erit.

409. **It is engend'red.** "It" is the plot to wreck Othello's happiness, which Iago likens to a hideous abortion just beginning to take shape in his brain.

Act Second

Scene I

[*A sea-port in Cyprus. An open place near the quay.*]

Enter Montano and two Gentlemen.

Mon. What from the cape can you discern at sea ?

1. *Gent.* Nothing at all ; it is a high-wrought flood.

I cannot, 'twixt the heaven and the main,

Descry a sail.

Mon. Methinks the wind hath spoke aloud at land ;

A fuller blast ne'er shook our battlements.

If it hath ruffian'd so upon the sea,

"I should like to draw attention to the *mise en scene* [scenery, setting] at the beginning of the Second Scene. Shakespeare's stage was naked of scenery. But the dialogue makes the scene spectacular. We see the town in the background, and the cliffs outside lined with people looking for the ships. Below is the tempestuous sea, and the great waves roaring. A group of gentlemen talk in the foreground, and in their talk we see Cassio's ship arrive, then Iago's, then Othello's. Cries of 'a sail! a sail!' guns going off, a trumpet sounding, announce these arrivals. Nothing is seen, but the dialogue paints all, as in a cinematograph." Stopford Brooke.

2. **a high-wrought flood**, a raging, tempestuous sea.

Cp. "The sea *works high*" *Pericles*, 3. 1. 47. "The sea *wrought* and was tempestuous. *Jonah*, 1. 11.

3. **'twixt the heaven and the main**, between the sky and the sea.

5. **spoke aloud**. Cp. "'Tis like to be *loud* weather." *Wint. Tale*, 3. 3. 11. "The wind is *loud*." *Pericles*, 3. 1. 47.

7. **ruffian'd so**, been as boisterous.



What ribs of oak, when mountains melt on them,
Can hold the mortise? What shall we hear of this?

2. *Gent.* A segregation of the Turkish fleet. 10

For do but stand upon the foaming shore,
The chidden billow seems to pelt the clouds;
The wind-shak'd surge, with high and monstrous mane,

ribs of oak, the timbers forming the sides of a ship (which bear some resemblance to the carcass of an animal. Cp. *Merchant of Venice*, 3. 1. 6).

when mountains melt on them. The "mountains" are the "hills of seas" of 189, below.

This description vividly brings before our mind's eye the great swelling waves, and the seemingly helpless vessel reeling to and fro in the midst of them.

9. **hold the mortise**, i.e., not become loose, not admit water, not spring a leak.

A ship's timbers are interlocked by the mechanism of *mortise and tenon*, the mortise being the cavity into which fits the correspondingly shaped tenon. This greatly increases the ship's power of resisting the violence of the waves.

10. **segregation**, scattering, dispersal.

This word is not here used in its etymological sense of "putting apart from others" (Latin *se* aside + *grex*, *gregis* a flock); as when we say to-day that "*segregation* is the first law of hygiene."

12. **chidden**, lashed by the wind. **pelt**, strike against.

"Pelt"—properly used only of small missiles, such as pebbles or rain-drops—is here used of the myriads of particles of spray from the **billows**—a curious instance of the pregnant construction.

13. **The wind-shaked surge...mane.** The white crests of the waves are likened to the tossing manes of wild horses. Cp. Matthew Arnold, *The Forsaken Merman* :

Now the wild white horses play,
Champ and chafe and toss in the spray.

Seems to cast water on the burning bear
 And quench the guards of the ever-fixed pole. 15
 I never did like molestation view
 On the enchafed flood.

Mon.

If that the Turkish fleet
 Be not enshelter'd and embay'd,* they are drown'd ;
 It is impossible to bear it out.

Enter a third Gentleman.

3. *Gent.* News, lads ! our wars are done. . 20
 The desperate tempest hath so bang'd the Turks,
 That their designment halts. A noble ship of Venice
 Hath seen a grievous wreck and sufferance

14. **the burning bear**, the constellation set down in star-maps as the Great Bear ;, but, from the configuration of its seven principal stars, more familiarly known as the Plough and Charles's Wain. " Burning " = " shining."

15. **quench**, extinguish. **the guards...pole**, the two brightest stars in the Lesser Bear. The " pole " is the North Star, to whose fixity Shakespeare frequently refers.

16. **molestation**, commotion.

17. **enchafed**, angry, furious. Cp. *Henry VIII*, 3. 2. 206 " *chafed* lion."

18. **ensheltered and embay'd**, sheltered from the tempest in some land-locked bay.

19. **bear it out**, weather it out, live through the storm.

21. **bang'd**, battered, buffeted.

22. **that their designment halts**, that their design upon Cyprus is crippled.

23. **sufferance**, distress, damage.



On most part of their fleet.

Mon. How ! is this true ?

3. Gent. The ship is here put in. 25

A Veronesa, Michael Cassio,
Lieutenant to the warlike Moor Othello,
Is come on shore ; the Moor himself at sea,
And is in full commission here for Cyprus.

Mon. I am glad on't ; 'tis a worthy governor. 30

3. Gent. But this same Cassio, though he speak of
comfort

Touching the Turkish loss, yet he looks sadly,
And prays the Moor be safe ; for they were parted
With foul and violent tempest.

Mon. Pray heavens he be ;
For I have serv'd him, and the man commands 35

26. **A Veronesa, Michael Cassio.** This is inconsistent with l. 1. 20, where we are told that Cassio was a Florentine.

Many editors (following Theobald) alter the punctuation of the Quartos and Folios, so as to make **A Veronesa** refer to the vessel ("The ship is here put in, a Veronesa") ; but this introduces a fresh difficulty, Verona not being a maritime town. Furness defends the original punctuation. The reader of Shakespeare must surely be prepared to wink at minor discrepancies like that in the text.

30. on't, of it. 'tis, he is.

Montano is glad to be relieved of the post of governor of Cyprus by a great man like Othello, under whom he had formerly served and whom he knew to be the right man for the present emergency.

34. foul, "dirty," stormy. Sailors speak of "dirty" weather and of a "dirty" sea.



Like a full soldier. Let's to the seaside, ho !
 As well to see the vessel that's come in
 As to throw out our eyes for brave Othello,
 Even till we make the main and the aerial blue
 An indistinct regard.

3. *Gent.* Come, let's do so : 40
 For every minute is expectancy
 Of more arrivance.

Enter Cassio.

Cas. Thanks, you the valiant of this warlike isle,
 That so approve the Moor ! O, let the heavens
 Give him defence against the elements, 45
 For I have lost him on a dangerous sea.

Mon. Is he well shipp'd ?

Cas. His bark is stoutly timber'd, and his pilot
 Of very expert and approv'd allowance ;

36. **a full soldier**, *i.e.*, all-round, and of ripe experience.

38-40. **throw out**, etc., watch the horizon-line till sea
 and sky merge into each other, form an indistinct blur,
 before our straining eyes. **regard**=vision, object of sight.

41-42. **is expectancy of new arrivance**, fresh arrivals
 are expected.

44. **approve**, approve of, show your love for: cp. 4. 3. 19.

47. **Is he well shipp'd ?** Is his ship built for weather
 like this ?

48. **stoutly timber'd** made of stout timbers. These
 are the curved pieces forming the ribs of the ship.

49. **of very.....allowance**, with a high reputation for
 ability and experience.



Therefore my hopes, not surfeited to death, 50
Stand in bold cure.

Within, "A sail, a sail, a sail!"

Enter a [fourth Gentleman].

Cas. What noise ?

[4.] *Gent.* The town is empty ; on the brow o' the sea
Stand ranks of people, and they cry, "A sail!"

Cas. My hopes do shape him for the governor. 55

A shot.

2. *Gent.* They do discharge their shot of courtesy.
Our friends at least.

Cas. I pray you, sir, go forth,
And give us truth who 'tis that is arriv'd.

Exit.

2. *Gent.* I shall.

50.51. **my hopes.....in bold cure**, not having over-indulged my hopes, I am confident that things will turn out as we fondly wish.

53. **the brow o' the sea**, the high cliff overlooking the harbour.

55. **My hopes...the governor**, I think this ship will be the new governor's—the wish being father to the thought.

With this use of "shape" cp. 3. 3. 148: "and oft my jealousy shapes faults that are not."

56. **shot of courtesy**, salute, gun fired as a signal of courtesy.

57. **our friends at least**, the new-comers are at least friendly to us.



Mon. But, good lieutenant, is your general wiv'd ? 60

Cas. Most fortunately. He hath achiev'd a maid

That paragons description and wild fame ;

One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,

And in the essential vesture of creation.

Does tire the ingener.

Re-enter second Gentleman.

How now ! who has put in ?

2. *Gent.* 'Tis one Iago, ancient to the general. 66

60. **wiv'd.** Cp. *Merchant of Venice*, 1. 2. 145 : " I had rather he should shrive me than *wive* me.

61. **achiev'd**, won ; cp. *ib.*, 3. 2. 210 :

I got a promise of this fair one here

To have her love, provided that your fortune

Achiev'd her mistress. .

62. **paragons**, surpasses. A " paragon " is a supremely excellent person or thing.

63. **the quirks of blazoning pens**, the conceits of ballad-makers and sonneteers who have taken Desdemona for the subject of their high-flown praises.

So in *Romeo and Juliet* (2. 6. 26) we find to " blazon " = to set forth in verse the praises of a mistress.

65. **Does tire the ingener**, tires the inventions of those who make her their theme.

" The meaning of the whole clause seems to be, ' She is one who surpasses all description, and in real beauty or outward form goes beyond the power of the artist's inventive or expressive pencil ' (Hudson). " The *ingener* is the contriver by ingenuity, the designer, and, here applied to a poet, is almost literally the Greek *poietaes*, maker " (Knight).

put in, put into port, entered the harbour.

how ever much the word be of the poet



Cas. He has had most favourable and happy speed.

Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling winds,

The gutter'd rocks and congregated sands,

Traitors ensteep'd to enclog the guiltless keel, 70

As having sense of beauty do omit

Their mortal natures, letting go safely by

The divine Desdemona.

Mon.

What is she?

Cas. She that I spake of, our great captain's captain,

Left in the conduct of the bold Iago, 75

Whose footing here anticipates our thoughts

A se'nnight's speed. Great Jove, Othello guard,

69. gutter'd, rugged, indented, water-worn. congregated sands, hidden shoals or quicksands, such as the dreaded Syrtes off the African coast.

70. ensteep'd, hidden under the surface of the water. enclog, impede.

71-72. omit Their mortal natures, refrain from putting forth their destructive powers.

74. our great captain's captain. Cp. 2. 3. 320, "Our general's wife is now the general."

76. footing, landing.

77. a se'nnight's speed, by a whole week. The voyage had taken a week less than the speaker anticipated.

The Anglo-Saxons reckoned their time by *nights*. Two weeks are still termed a fortnight [fourteen-nights] and formerly a week was termed a se'nnight [seven-nights].

Great Jove, The speaker invokes Jupiter, the chief Roman deity. Why not rather his brother Neptune, the King of the Sea? Hudson alters "Jove" to "God."



And swell his sail with thine own powerful breath,
 That he may bless this bay with his tall ship,
 Makes love's quick pants in Desdemona's arms, 80
 Give renew'd fire to our extincted spirits,
 [And bring all Cyprus comfort !]

Enter Desdemona, Emilia, Iago, Roderigo
[and Attendants.]

O, behold,

The riches of the ship is come on shore !
 You men of Cyprus, let her have your knees.
 Hail to thee, lady ! and the grace of heaven, 85
 Before, behind thee, and on every hand,
 Enwheel thee round !

79. **tall**, brave, stately ; the ordinary epithet applied to fine vessels. Cp. *Merchant of Venice*, 3. 1. 6 : "...where the carcasses of many a *tall* ship lie buried."

81. **extincted**, extinct, extinguished ; on the verge of despair. An obsolete form of the participle.

83. **riches**, is a singular noun, being derived from the French *richesse*, = wealth. Cp. 3. 3. 173.

84. **let her have your knees**, kneel to her in sign of homage—a courtesy commonly extended to noble women in the days of chivalry.

85-87. Cassio's salutation is reminiscent of *Psalm* 139, 5 : "Thou hast beset me **before** and **behind**." **enwheel thee round**, encompass thee on every side.

This benediction befits a woman "full of most blessed condition," and Coleridge remarks, that "it ought to be impossible that the dullest auditor should not feel Cassio's religious love of Desdemona's purity."



Des. I thank you, valiant Cassio.

What tidings can you tell me of my lord ?

Cas. He is not yet arriv'd ; nor know I aught

But that he's well and will be shortly here. 90

Des. O, but I fear—How lost you company ?

Cas. The great contention of the sea and skies

Parted our fellowship.—But, hark ! a sail.

Within, " A sail, a sail !" [Guns heard.]

2. *Genl.* They give their greeting to the citadel. 95

This likewise is a friend.

Cas.

See for the news.

[Exit Gentleman.]

Good ancient, you are welcome. *[To Emilia.]*

Welcome, mistress.

Let it not gall your patience, Iago,

That I extend my manners ; 'tis my breeding

That gives me this bold show of courtesy. 100

[Kisses her.]

Iago. Sir, would she give you so much of her lips

As of her tongue she oft bestows on me,

You'd have enough.

Des.

Alas, she has no speech.

Iago. In faith, too much ;

93. **Parted our fellowship**, sundered our ships.

96. **a friend**, another ship of Venice.

99. **extend my manners**, *i.e.*, beyond mere bowing and hand-shaking. The stage-direction (Johnson's) explains what he means.



I find it still, when I have list to sleep.

105

Marry, before your ladyship, I grant,
She puts her tongue a little in her heart,
And chides with thinking.

Emil. You have little cause to say so.

Iago. Come on, come on; you are pictures out of
doors,

110

Bells in your parlours, wild-cats in your kitchens,
Saints in your injuries, devils being offended,
Players in your housewifery, and housewives in
your beds.

Des. O, fie upon thee, slanderer! *(Some say this was spoken by Des.)*

105. **still**, ever. **list**, inclination. This word is cognate with "lust."

106. **Marry**. An exclamation derived from the name of the Virgin Mary. Cp. 1. 2. 53.

108. **chides with thinking**, upbraids you in her silent, inaudible thoughts.

110. **pictures**, painted things.

Shakespeare has many references to the use of paint as a cosmetic. Cp. the passage quoted in the note on 143 below; and *Hamlet*, 3. 1. 142, "I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God has given you one face and you make yourselves another."

111. **Bells**, because your tongues are never done wagging.

112. **saints...injuries**. "When you have a mind to do injuries, you put on an air of sanctity" (Johnson).

114. **O, fie upon thee, slanderer**. Iago frequently calumniates the fair sex. Cp. note on 1. 1. 21.

"Surely it ought to be considered a very exalted compliment to women, that all the sarcasms on them in Shakespeare are put in the mouths of villains." (Coleridge.)

Des. Worse and worse. 135

Emil. How if fair and foolish?

Iago. She never yet was foolish that was fair;

For even her folly help'd her to an heir.

Des. These are old fond paradoxes to make fools
laugh i' the alehouse. What miserable praise 140
hast thou for her that's foul and foolish?

Iago. There's none so foul and foolish thereunto,
But does foul pranks which fair and wise ones do.

Des. O heavy ignorance! thou praisest the worst
best. But what praise couldst thou bestow 145
on a deserving woman indeed, one that, in the
authority of her merit, did justly put on the vouch
of very malice itself?

Iago. She that was ever fair and never proud,

138. **folly**, foolishness, with a play on the meaning of
"wantonness." See on 5. 2. 132.

139. **fond**, foolish. **paradoxes**, statements contrary to
received opinion.

143. **foul and foolish**. "Foul" here = "ugly" (and
still used in this sense provincially). Cp. *Sonnet*, 117. 6:

"Fairing the foul with art's false borrow'd face."

146-148. **One that.....malice itself**. To "put on" =
to provoke, to challenge.

"The sense is this: One that was so conscious of her own merit,
and of the authority her character had with every one, that she durst
call upon malice itself to vouch for her. This was strong commenda-
tion, and the character of clearest virtue, which could force malice,
even against its nature, to do it justice." Warburton.

Had tongue at will and yet was never loud, 150 •
 Never lack'd gold and yet went never gay,

Fled from her wish and yet said, "Now I may,"

She that being ang'red, her revenge being nigh,

Bade her wrong stay and her displeasure fly,

She that in wisdom never was so frail 155

To change the cod's head for the salmon's tail,

She that could think and ne'er disclose her mind,

See suitors following and not look behind,

She was a wight, if ever such wights were,—

Des. To do what? 160

Iago. To suckle fools and chronicle small beer.

Des. O most lame and impotent conclusion! Do
 not learn of him, Emilia, though he be thy
 husband. How say you, Cassio? Is he not a

150. **Had tongue at will**, had a ready or fluent utterance.

151. **gay**, gaily dressed. So in *Henry V*, 110, "gayness" = "finery."

154-156. These lines mean that the woman singled out by Iago for praise can control her wishes and can nurse her revenge till the most fitting opportunity.

156. **To change... tail**. A proverbial expression for "to make a bad bargain."

The head is esteemed the best part of a cod-fish, and the tail the worst of a salmon.

161. **To suckle fools.....beer**, to be a mother of fools and to keep petty household accounts.

162. **lame and impotent**, because it was a ridiculous and unexpected descent from the serious to the commonplace.

most profane and liberal counsellor?

165

Cas. He speaks home, madam. You may relish him more in the soldier than in the scholar.

Iago. [*Aside.*] He takes her by the palm; ay, well said, whisper. With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do; I will gyve thee in thine own courtship.— You say true; 'tis so, indeed.—If such tricks as these strip you out of your lieutenantry, it had

170

165. **profane and liberal**, free of speech and licentious.

166-167. **home**, straight to the point. **You may relish...scholar.** *Cassio* apologises for *Iago*: "You ought to judge of *Iago* rather as a blunt soldier than as a fine scholar."

168-179. This soliloquy is *Iago*'s running commentary on the little side show that is enacted between *Cassio* and *Desdemona* as they compare notes about the late voyage. We have seen above that *Cassio* is a great admirer of *Desdemona*, that he worships the very ground she treads on; but the sensualist *Iago*, leering at them with his wicked eyes, easily persuades himself that their innocent courtesy is illicit love-making. He returns to this idea in 262-269 and 295-296.

168. **well said.** In other places (4. 1. 117 and 5. 1. 98) "well said" is used where we expect "well done": but here it may refer to some remark which *Iago* has overheard.

With as little a web, etc. *Iago* likens himself to a spider and *Cassio* to a fly which he is about to allure into his toils.

171. **gyve**, manacle, fetter, entrap. **courtship**, courtliness of manner (with a play on the sense of "wooing").

173. **lieutenantry**, office of lieutenant, the post coveted by *Iago*.

been better you had not kiss'd your three fingers
so oft, which now again you are most apt to 175
play the sir in. Very good; well kiss'd! an
excellent curtsy! 'Tis so, indeed. Yet again
your fingers to your lips? Would they were
clyster-pipes for your sake! (*Trumpet within.*)—

The Moor! I know his trumpet. 180

Cas. 'Tis truly so.

Des. Let's meet him and receive him. *There is nothing ill about*

Cas. Lo, where he comes!

176. **play the sir**, act the ^{cavalier} fine gentleman. Cassio is a
man of quality and a courtier, while it is pretty plain that
Iago is neither.

184-200. The meeting of Othello and Desdemona in Cyprus is the
happiest moment in the play. After all his fears for her safety, that
he should see her thus happily landed before himself is a joy and relief
beyond the power of language to express.

Shakespeare did not bring about this happy re-union without
considerably modifying the Italian tale. We have seen above that
three separate ships bring the different personages to Cyprus; first
Cassio; then Desdemona, Iago, and Emilia; and lastly Othello. This
multiplicity of vessels is Shakespeare's invention, as well as the
tempestuous voyage. In Cinthio's *Hecatombithi*, the story reads simply
as follows:—

"Then speedily donning his armour, and having prepared every-
thing for his expedition, the Moor embarked on board the galley with
his wife [*colla sua Donna*], and, setting sail, they pursued their
voyage, and with a perfectly tranquil sea [*e con somma tranquillita
mare*] arrived safely at Cyprus."

Enter Othello and Attendants.

happiest time O at the climax of happiness
she accompanied him
 Oth. O my fair warrior!

Des. My dear Othello!

Oth. It gives me wonder^a great as my content 185

To see you here before me. O my soul's joy!

If after every tempest come such calms,

May the winds blow till they have waken'd death!

And let the labouring back climb hills of seas

Olympus-high, and duck again as low 190

As hell's from heaven! If it were now to die,

'Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear,

184. **O my fair warrior:** This alludes to the unflinching resolution Desdemona had shown in following her husband to the wars.

185. **content**, fullness of joy. Cp. 2 *Henry VI*, 1. 1. 35.

Such is the fulness of my heart's content.

188. **waken'd death.** Perhaps to feast on the drowned bodies, as in *King John*, 2. 1. 352-356.

189. **labouring**, heavily pitching and rolling.

190. **Olympus-high.** This refers to the mountain in Thessaly celebrated in Homeric myth as the dwelling-place of the gods. **duck again**—into the trough of the waves.

Cp. the description of the billows in *Psalms* 107, 26: "They mount up to heaven, they go down again to the depths."

191. **If it were now to die.** Othello's words are far truer than he knows.

"...This classical irony, as it is called, which plays on the ignorance of man, and makes him a prophet in spite of himself, is an essential part of Shakespeare's method. It runs all through *Othello*, so that only a repeated reading of the play can bring out its full meaning."

Raleigh, *Shakespeare*, p. 103.

now: more than ever seems it rich to die



SCENE I.]

THE MOOR OF VENICE

85

no other comfort can await me in the dim distance
 My soul hath her content so absolute
 That not another comfort like to this
 Succeeds in unknown fate. 194

Des. The heavens forbid
 But that our loves and comforts should increase,
 Even as our days do grow !

Oth. Amen to that, sweet powers !
 I cannot speak enough of this content ; *wonder full me to e*
 It stops me here ; it is too much of joy. *the intense happiness*
 And this, and this, the greatest discords be 200

may kissing [Kissing her.]
 That e'er our hearts shall make !

Iago. [Aside.] O' you are well tun'd now ! *brought to the same pitch cannot bear see another's happiness*

195. **in unknown fate**, in the future state.

197. **sweet powers**. The fates, that have hitherto been so auspicious, are addressed as "sweet" to propitiate them for the future.

199. **It stops me here**: pressing his hands to his breast. **too much of joy**. We are reminded of Portia's wonderful outburst of joy in the *Merchant of Venice* (3. 2. 113) :

O love be moderate ; allay thy ecstasy ;
 In measure rain thy joy ; scant this excess.
 I feel too much thy blessing : make it less,
 For fear I surfeit.

Shakespeare puts very similar words into the mouth of Pericles (*Pericles*, 5. 1. 192) :

O Helicanus, strike me, honour'd sir ;
 Give me a gash, put me to present pain ;
 Lest this great sea of joys rushing upon me
 O'erbear the shores of my mortality,
 And drown me with their sweetness.

But I'll set down the pegs that make this music,
As honest as I am.

Oth. Come, let us to the castle.

News, friends : our wars are done, the Turks are
drown'd.

How does my old acquaintance of this isle ? 205

Honey, you shall be well desir'd in Cyprus ;

I have found great love amongst them. O my
sweet,

202. **set down the pegs.** A figure from the tuning of the strings of a musical instrument. Cp. *Troil. & Cressida* 1. 3. 109 :

Untune that string, and hark what discord follows !

201-203. This is spoken *aside*. Perhaps no character in Shakespeare speaks so many asides as Iago. Satan at his first sight of Adam and Eve in paradise is filled with thoughts strangely like to those of Iago, which Milton renders in the following lines ;

Aside the Devil turned

For envy ; yet with jealous leer malign

Eyed them askance, and to himself thus plained :—

' Sight hateful, sight tormenting : Thus these two,

Imparadised in one another's arms,

The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill

Of bliss on bliss !

203. **As honest as I am.** " Iago resents the good opinion of his own integrity, as if it were an affront cast on the masculine sense and spirit of his character" (Hazlitt).

205. **acquaintance,** acquaintances.

This word is singular in form but plural in meaning, like so many other nouns ending in sibilants (s, se, ss, ce).

206. **well desir'd,** in high favour, much sought after.



contrary to my good breeding
 I prattle out of fashion, and I dote
 In mine own comforts. I prithee, good Iago,
 Go to the bay and disembark my coffers. *love my good* 210
 Bring thou the master to the citadel;
 He is a good one, and his worthiness *deserve*
 Does challenge much respect. Come, Desdemona,
 Once more, well met at Cyprus. *let me repeat that*

Exeunt Othello, Desdemona [and Attendants.]

Iago. Do thou meet me presently at the harbour. 215

Come hither. If thou be'st valiant,—as, they
Love brings out all that is noble. Love is greater
 say, base men being in love have then a nobility
than faith. Love perfect love is selfless & without fear

208. out of fashion, more than is becoming in public.

I dote... comforts, I talk in a foolish way about my individual happiness.

215-294. Iago, having brought Roderigo to Cyprus, loses no time in turning his dupe to account for the furtherance of his own nefarious designs. In the first place he convinces Roderigo that a love-intrigue is in progress between Cassio and Desdemona, and that in order to get a freer stage for his own suit it will be necessary to get rid of Cassio. Once this impediment is cleared out of the way, Roderigo will have a shorter journey to his desires by the means Iago will then have to advance them. Now Cassio, he tells him, is to be on guard-duty that night. Roderigo must provoke him by showing him some indignity or other, so that Cassio may be moved to strike at him; and Iago undertakes to manage things so that this will lead to a serious mutiny, only to be quelled by the displanting of Cassio. Roderigo readily agrees to everything Iago proposes.

217. base men... native to them. This sentiment is to be found in many writers from Plato downwards.

"No man is such a coward that love would not inspire him to valour till he should become equal to those bravest by nature." Plato's *Symposium*.



in their natures more than is ^{convenient} native to them,
—list me. The lieutenant to-night watches
on the court of guard;—first, I must tell thee 220
this : Desdemona is ^{steeped} directly in love with him.

Rod. With him ! why, 'tis not possible.

Iago. Lay thy finger thus, and let thy soul be in-
structed. Mark me with what violence she first
lov'd the Moor, but for bragging and telling her 225
fantastical lies. To love him still for prating, ^{Keep the matter secret}
let not thy discreet heart think it. Her eye must
be fed ; and what delight shall she have to look
on the devil ? When the blood is made dull with
the act of sport, there should be, again to inflame 230
it, and to give satiety a fresh appetite, loveliness

“ There is no man so pusillanimous, so very a dastard, whom love would not incense, make of a divine temper, and an heroical spirit.”
Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621).

218. **native**, natural. **list me**, listen to me.

220. **the court of guard**, the place where the guard musters.

221. **directly in love**, “ over head and ears in love.”

223. **Lay thy finger thus**, *viz.*, on thy lips (as I do).

This may be either in token of secrecy or, as Johnson has it, because he is listening to a wiser man. Cp. *Judges* 18, 19.

226. **fantastical lies**, extravagant falsehoods. Othello's romantic story had only stirred contempt in Iago.

“ Lies ! ” indignantly exclaims Christopher North, “ Who ever heard Othello relate and hung back from believing him ? ”

228. **the devil**. The Moor is so called in allusion to his dark complexion. Cp. *Merch. of Venice*, 1. 2. 144.

in favour, sympathy in years, manners, and
 beauties ; all which the Moor is defective in.
 Now, for want of these requir'd conveniences,
 her delicate tenderness will find itself abus'd, 235
 begin to heave the gorge, disrelish and abhor the
 Moor. Very nature will instruct her in it and
 compel her to some second choice. Now, sir, this
 granted,—as it is a most pregnant and unforc'd
 position—who stands so eminent in the degree of 240
 this fortune as Cassio does ? a knave very voluble ;
 no further conscionable than in putting on the
 mere form of civil and humane seeming, for the
 better compassing of his salt and most hidden loose

232. **favour** face, looks. **sympathy**, correspondence,
 agreement. *similarity.*

The modern sense of " fellow-feeling " is not met with in Elizabethan writers. *agreeable things.*

234. **conveniences** has the sense of Latin *convenientia* =
 things that contribute to bring about accord, harmony, fitness.

235. **delicate**, dainty, fastidious. Cp. 1. 2. 74.

This word appears to be peculiarly applicable to Desdemona, for
 it is used of her no less than 5 times. Cp. 1. 2. 74, 2. 3. 20, 3. 3. 269 and
 4. 1. 199. The word had not yet acquired its later sense of " liable to
 illness."

235-236. **abused**, imposed upon. **heave the gorge** : i.e.,
 the mere sight of him will turn her stomach.

239. **a most pregnant...position**, a self-evident
 proposition.

242. **conscionable**, governed by conscience, scrupulous.

243. **civil seeming**, urbane manners, outward decorum.

compassing : here used as in 1. 3. 367.

244. **salt and...loose**, lewd and wanton.



affection? Why, none; why, none; a slipper and 245
 subtle knave, a finder of occasion, that has an
 eye can stamp and counterfeit advantages, *one who finds out opportunities for carrying out his will*
 though true advantage never present itself; a *forge & fabricate*
 devilish knave. Besides, the knave is hand- 250
 some, young, and hath all those requisites in
 him that folly and green minds look after; a
 pestilent complete knave, and the woman hath *Desdemona*
 found him already. *suitable for her guilty love.*

Rod. I cannot believe that in her; she's full of
 'most bless'd condition. 255

Iago. Bless'd fig's-end! The wine she drinks is

246. **slipper**, slippery, not easily caught.

248. • **stamp and counterfeit advantages**, create opportunities (for himself). The underlying figure likens Cassio to a coiner.

252. **green**, inexperienced. Cp. "You speak like a green girl." *Hamlet*, 1. 3. 101.

254. **hath found him**, has discovered him to be to her liking.

Hunter's explanation, "hath supplied him," is at variance with 262-269, below.

full...condition, a woman of angelic nature. *modest condition + cannot be guilty of infidelity*

"With the one exception of Iago, whose hard heart nothing touches, every person in the play feels her holy influence." Miller.

256. **Blessed fig's end!** Blessed condition, forsooth! This vulgar expletive was accompanied by an indecent gesture. Cp. 1. 3. 322.

For the accomplishing of his scheme Desdemona must be degraded in Roderigo's eyes; hence Iago's impatience at Roderigo's assertion of her saintliness.



made of grapes. If she had been bless'd, she would never have lov'd the Moor. Blessed pudding! Didst thou not see her paddle with the palm of his hand? Didst not mark that? 260

Rod. Yes, that I did; but that was but courtesy.

Iago. Lechery, by this hand; an index and obscure prologue to the history of lust and foul thoughts. They met so near with their lips ^{As if Kiss} that their breaths embrac'd together. ^{other} Vil. 265
lanous thoughts, Roderigo! When these mutualities so marshal the way, hard at hand

The wine she drinks, etc. She is fond of men of the proper sort. *She is like any other woman no exception the general rule.*

258. **Blessed pudding!** A strong expression of contempt—"stuff and nonsense!"

259. **paddle**, toy, play fondly with. Cp. *Winter's Tale*, 1. 2. 115.

260. **Didst** (thou) **not mark that.** The personal pronoun is often omitted in familiar colloquy. Cp. 3. 3. 310.

262. **by this hand.** Iago raises his hand to emphasize his words.

We find the same gesture repeated in 1.4.139; 185; and 4.2.196.

index, fore-runner, precursor. *Indication of a hidden beginning of his foul thoughts.*

Formerly the "index" was placed at the beginning—like the "table of contents" in our modern books. Shakespeare has references to this fact in *Richard III*, 2. 2. 148; 4. 4. 85; *Hamlet*, 3. 4. 52, etc.

263. **prologue to the history.** Both terms alike are borrowed from the vocabulary of the stage.

"History"=stage-play, story represented dramatically, *The Taming of the Shrew* (which he is about to witness) is described to Christopher Sly as "a kind of history" (*Ind.* 2. 145). Cp. *As You Like It*, 2. 7. 164, ("Last scene of all, That ends this strange eventful history").



comes the master and main exercise, the in-
 corporate conclusion. Pish! But, sir, be
 you ruled by me; I have brought you from 270
 Venice, Watch you to-night; for the com-
 mand, I'll lay it upon you. Cassio knows you
 not. I'll not be far from you. Do you find
 some occasion to anger Cassio, either by speak-
 ing too loud, or tainting his discipline; or from 275
 what other course you please, which the time
 shall more favourably minister.

Rod. Well?

Iago. Sir, he's rash and very sudden in choler, and
 haply may strike at you. Provoke him, that 280
 he may; for even out of that will I cause these
 of Cyprus to mutiny; whose qualification shall
 come into no true taste again but by the dis-
 planting of Cassio. So shall you have a shorter
 journey to your desires by the means I shall 285

273. I'll not be far from you. Iago is aware of Roderigo's dependence on himself. Cp. 5. 1. 3.

275. **tainting**, throwing a slur upon, bringing into discredit.

277. **minister**, furnish, provide. Latin *ministrare*.

279. **sudden in choler**, easily provoked to anger. **to mutiny**, to make a public commotion, to break the peace; not "to rebel against authority."

282. **qualification**, appeasement, pacification.

283. **the displanting of Cassio**, his *supplanting*, his deposition from office.

The name "Iago is a corruption of "Jacob," which in Hebrew signifies "supplanter."

then have to prefer them; and the impediment ^{obstacle he} most profitably removed, without the which there ^{Cassio} were no expectation of our prosperity.

Rod. I will do this, if you can bring it to any opportunity. 290

Iago. I warrant thee. Meet me by and by at the citadel; I must fetch his necessaries ashore. Farewell.

Rod. Adieu. ^{perfectly convinced. Sh. uses this} *Erit.*

Iago. That Cassio loves her, I do well believe't, ^{soliloquy to} ²⁹⁵ ^{am making to Iago} ^{suwara habu}

286. **prefer**, advance, promote.

Cp. *Hen. VIII*, 4. 1. 102, "Newly preferred from the king's secretary." This sense of "prefer" is still preserved in "preferment = promotion."

288. **prosperity** success: Cp. *Love's Labours Lost*, 5. 2. 871.

A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
Of him that makes it.

292. **his**. "Even the word *his* here in reference to Othello, without naming him or giving him his title, has characteristic effect in Iago's mouth as a piece of cool, off-hand, slighting mention; and is therefore calculated to confirm the impression he wishes to produce upon Roderigo of hatred towards the Moor" (Clarke).

295-321. Iago's second soliloquy is largely a repetition of the first (1. 3. 389-410), and, like the earlier one, might fitly be described in Coleridge's words as "the motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity." He repeats his former suspicion that Othello has been too familiar with Emilia, and he vows that "nothing can or will content his soul till he is even'd with him, wife for wife." He begins to suspect Cassio too of tampering with Emilia. His scheme for the ruin of Othello has assumed firmer outlines, but he still leaves its full development to time and future contingencies.

"With Shakespeare soliloquy generally gives information regarding the secret springs, as well as the outward course, of the plot;

That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit ;
 The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not,
 Is of a constant, loving, noble nature,
 And I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona
 A most dear husband. Now I do love her too ;
 Not out of absolute lust, though peradventure 300
 I stand accountant for as great a sin,
 But partly led to diet my revenge,
 For that I do suspect the lusty Moor 304
 Hath leap'd into my seat ; the thought whereof

and, moreover, it is a curious point of technique with him that the soliloquies of his villains sometimes read almost like explanations offered to the audience." Bradley.

296. **apt and of great credit**, quite natural and quite credible. *May easily be believed. Cassio is very fascinating.*

297. **howbeit**, although.

302 **as great a sin**. Ironical. "Fools make a mock at sin." *Proverbs*, 14, 9.

Other descriptions of the "fool" in *Proverbs* are curiously applicable to Iago : Cp. 14, 9 : "The folly of fools is deceit ;" and 10, 23 : "It is sport for a fool to do mischief." In spite of his diabolical cleverness he is only a fool after all, and the greatest of Shakespeare's making.

"He makes the best of circumstances that he can ; he wins his points ; he is always alert, maleficent, superior to his opportunity ; and in the long run he is found to be merely the peer of the Hogarthian Thomas Idle." W. E. Henley.

303. **to diet my revenge**. Cp. Shylock's phrase : "to feed my revenge." *Merch. of Venice*, 3. 1. 56.

304. **I do suspect**, etc. "This demi-devil is always trying to give himself reasons for his malignity, is always half-fooling himself by dwelling on half motives, in which he partly believes, but disbelieves in the main." Brandes.

Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards : *Eats into my vitals?*

And nothing can or shall content my soul

Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife ;

Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor

At least into a jealousy so strong 310

That judgement cannot cure. Which thing to do,

If this poor trash of Venice, whom I trash

For his quick hunting, stand the putting on,

I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip, *Does not injure by hunting Cassio thus destroy my self?*

Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb— 315

306. **like a poisonous mineral**, etc. "This is philosophical. Mineral poisons kill by corrosion" (Johnson).

"This thought, originally by Iago's own confession, a mere suspicion, is now ripening, and gnaws his base nature as his own 'poisonous mineral' is about to gnaw the noble heart of his general."

309. **that** is a "pro-conjunction," saving the repetition of "till" Cp. 2. 1. 54.

312. **whom I trash**, whom I restrain or hold back.

This is a metaphor from the hunting-ground. To "trash" a dog is to fasten a weight about its neck so as to check its speed if it shows signs of being too eager for the chase. Iago means that he is obliged to restrain Roderigo in his impetuous pursuit of Desdemona.

313. **stand the putting on**, i.e., the instigation, the urging forward.

"Putting on," in this sense, is just the opposite of "trash," but Iago refers now, not to Roderigo's "quick-hunting" of Desdemona,—for which he came to Cyprus—but to his picking a quarrel with Cassio—an entirely different matter.

314. **have...on the hip**, have at an advantage. A term in wrestling.

In the *Merchant of Venice* (1. 3. 47) Shylock, referring to Antonio says: "If I can catch him once upon the hip."

315. **in the rank garb**, in the coarsest terms.

For I fear Cassio with my night-cap too—
 Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me,
 For making him egregiously an ass *notably*
 And practising upon his peace and quiet
 Even to madness. 'Tis here, but yet confus'd;
 Knavery's plain face is never seen till us'd.

319

Exit.

Scene II

[A street.]

Enter Othello's Herald, with a proclamation [People following.]

Her. It is Othello's pleasure, our noble and valiant
 general, that, upon certain tidings now arriv'd

"Garb" = "manner." This word is never found in Shakespeare or his contemporaries in the meaning of "fashion of dress," "costume."

320. 'Tis here: putting his hand to his head.

321. "An honest man acts upon a plan and forecasts his designs; but a knave depends upon temporary and local opportunities, and never knows his own purpose but at the time of execution." Johnson.

It is the afternoon of the day of landing in Cyprus. The news of the destruction of the Turkish fleet, coinciding with the celebration of the nuptials of the new Governor, makes it a fitting occasion for a public rejoicing. All are therefore authorised to give themselves up to feasting and merry-making till the castle bell has tolled eleven o'clock.

2. upon, following upon, in consequence of. certain, sure, indisputable. *because of*



importing the mere perdition of the Turkish fleet,
 every man put himself into triumph ; some to
 dance, some to make bonfires, each man to what
 sport and revels his addiction leads him ; for,
 beside these beneficial news, it is the celebration
 of his nuptial.—So much was his pleasure should
 be proclaimed. All offices are open, and there
 is full liberty of feasting from this present hour
 of five till the bell have told eleven. Heaven
 bless the isle of Cyprus and our noble general
 Othello !

Exeunt.

3. **Importing**, having for their import or purport : Cp.
 5. 2. 310. **mere perdition**, complete destruction.

4. **put himself into triumph**, give himself over to
 merry-making. Latin *triumphus*, a public rejoicing to wel-
 come a victorious general.

6. **addiction**, bent, inclination.

8. **So much was**, etc., that so much should be proclaimed
 was his pleasure. **all offices are open**, *i.e.*, the rooms in
 the castle at which refreshments were served out.

Cp. *Timon of Athens*, 2 2. 168. "All our offices have been oppress'd
 With riotous feeders."

12. **Told**. The later Folios have "toll'd." *Shaks.*

Scene III

[Hall of the Castle.]

*Enter Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, and Attendants.**Oth.* Good Michael, look you to the guard to-night.Let's teach ourselves that honourable stop, *Don't drink too much*
Not to outsport discretion.*Cas.* Iago hath direction what to do ;

But, notwithstanding, with my personal eye

5

Will I look to't. *Superior**Oth.* Iago is most honest.Michael, good night ; to-morrow with your ear-
liest *at your earliest opportunity*

This scene takes place in the guard-room of the castle, leading out from which is the open space which we would now call the parade ground (referred to as "the court of guard," 2. 1. 220) ; beyond this would be the terrace or "platform" (124), looking seawards, where the sentinels took turns for guard-duty at night.

[The location "Hall of the Castle" is mere editorial guess-work (Capell's), and therefore enclosed in brackets in this edition.]

It is the night of the revels, and Cassio has command of the guard ; Othello, before retiring to rest, strictly charges him to see that no excesses are committed—a solemn warning that greatly aggravates the subsequent breach of discipline.

1. **Good Michael.** "Othello calls him by his Christian name 'Michael,' which, after the one final impressive appeal to him,—'How comes, it, Michael, you are thus forgot?' (188 below),—he never again uses." Clarke.

2. **that honourable stop,** *viz.*, self-restraint, self-control ; excessive drinking being a breach of *honour*.

3. **not...discretion,** to keep our merry-making within reasonable limits.

Let me have speech with you. [*To Desdemona.*]

Come, my dear love,

{ The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue ; follow
That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you. 10

Good-night.

Exeunt [*Othello, Desdemona and Attendants*].

Enter Iago.

Cas. Welcome, Iago ; we must to the watch. *on guard*

Iago. Not this hour, lieutenant ; 'tis not yet ten
o' the clock. Our general cast us thus early for *dismiss*
the love of his Desdemona ; who let us not there- 15
fore blame *scholar* He hath not yet made wanton the
night with her ; and she is sport for Jove.

Cas. She's a most exquisite lady.

Iago. And, I'll warrant her, full of game. *wanton & lascivious*

Cas. Indeed, 'she's a most fresh and delicate crea- 20
ture.

12-49. Cassio wishes to set the watch at once, but Iago comes along and objects that it is far too early yet. "And remember that this in the night of Othello's nuptials ! On an occasion like the present, you cannot be such a kill-joy and puritan as to refuse to drink with the rest of the gallants to the health of the happy couple !"

13. **Not this hour**, not for a whole hour yet.

14. **cast us**, dismissed us. See 1. 1. 150.

18-29. "Iago each time answers Cassio's respectful expressions about Desdemona with some corresponding remark, but in terms which clearly reveal a coarse, sensual mind, thereby indicating from what point of view he regards women, even such a refined and exalted woman as Desdemona." Goll, *Criminal Types in Shakespeare*, p. 212.

Iago. What an eye she has! Methinks it sounds
a parley to provocation. *provokes a man to love her*

Cas. An inviting eye; and yet methinks right
modest. 25

Iago. And when she speaks, is it not an alarum to
love?

Cas. She is indeed perfection. *ideal*

Iago. Well, happiness to their sheets! Come, lieu-
tenant, I have a stoup^x of wine; and here 30
of Scotch without are a brace of Cyprus gallants that
would fain have a measure to the health of
black Othello.

Cas. Not to-night, good Iago. I have very poor
and unhappy brains for drinking; I could well 35
A small quantity of wine upsets me
wish courtesy would invent some other custom
of entertainment.

Iago. O, they are our friends; but one cup; I'll
drink for you.

22. **sounds a parley.** A military metaphor: Cp.
"alarum" (26).

30. **a stoup,** a flagon, often of pewter.

31. **gallants,** men of fashion, fine gentlemen.

32. **have a measure,** drink a toast. Cp. *Macbeth*, 3. 4. 11:

Be large in mirth; anon we'll drink *a measure*

The table round.

36. **courtesy,** good manners, the rules of polite society;
hard drinking was formerly considered a gentlemanly
accomplishment.

38. **they,** cups, carousals. **for you,** *i.e.*, some of your
share, should you feel inclined to shirk your liquor.



Cas. I have drunk but one cup to-night, and that
 was craftily qualified too,—and, behold, what
 innovation it makes here. I am unfortunate
 in the infirmity, and dare not task my weak-
 ness with any more.

Iago. What, man! 'tis a night of revels: the
 gallants desire it.

Cas. Where are they?

Iago. Here at the door; I pray you, call them in.

Cas. I'll do't; but it dislikes me.

Iago. If I can fasten but one cup upon him,

With that which he hath drunk to-night already,
 He'll be as full of quarrel and offence

As my young mistress' dog. Now my sick fool

Roderigo,

Whom love hath turn'd almost the wrong side out,

To Desdemona hath to-night carous'd

Potations pottle-deep; and he's to watch.

41. **craftily qualified**, silyly mixed with water.

42. **innovation**, disturbance. **here**: touching his head.

43. **the infirmity**: inability to carry one's liquor.

49. **it dislikes me**, it is against my wishes.

50. **fasten...upon him**, force him to drink.

53. **my young mistress' dog**. An idiomatic use of the personal pronoun, referring to no mistress and no dog in particular.

54. **turn'd...the wrong side out**, changed...beyond all recognition, "transmogrified," cp. 4. 2. 146.

55-56. **To Desdemona...deep**, has emptied his tankard again and again in drinking bumpers to Desdemona.



Three else of Cyprus, noble swelling spirits,
 (That hold their honours in a wary distance,
 The very elements of this warlike isle),
 Have I to-night fluster'd with flowing cups, 60
 And they watch too. Now, 'mongst this flock
 of drunkards

Am I to put our Cassio in some action
 That may offend the isle. But here they come.

Re-enter Cassio ; with him Montano and Gentlemen

[Servants follow with wine.]

If consequence do but approve my dream, 64
 My boat sails freely, both with wind and stream.

57. noble swelling spirits, haughty and high-mettled fellows.

58. That hold...distance, that are quick to resent insults, that are sensitive on the point of honour; men with whom it is "a word and a blow."

59. the very elements, the prime spirits. *quintessence*

60. fluster'd, excited: hardly as strong as "intoxicated."

63. offend the isle, disquiet the islanders. Cp. "shake this island" (133, below).

64. If consequence, etc., if the upshot of all this answers to my expectations.

"Every scheme subsisting only in the imagination may be termed a dream" (Johnson).

65. My boat...stream. He likens his plot to a boat borne rapidly along by the united force of wind and current.

For other nautical expressions used by Iago see 1. 1. 30; 153; 1. 2. 17; 50; and 1. 3. 343.



Cas. 'Fore God, they have given me a rouse
already.

Mon. Good faith, a little one; not past a pint, as I
am a soldier.

Iago. Some wine, ho!

70

[*Sings.*] "And let me the canakin clink, clink;
And let me the canakin clink.

A soldier's a man;

O, man's life's but a span;

Why, then, let a soldier drink."

75

Some wine, boys!

Cas. 'Fore God, an excellent song.

Iago. I learn'd it in England, where indeed, they are
most potent in potting; your Dane your German,

66. **a rouse**, a big bumper, an overflowing cup.

71. **canakin**, a little can used as a drinking-vessel.
clink; viz., by striking it against his neighbour's canakin;
the custom in drinking healths.

"'Have another glass!'—'With you. Hob and nob. The top of my
glass to the foot of yours—the foot of yours to the top of mine.
Ring once, ring twice—the best tune on the Musical Glasses! Your
health!'" Dickens, *Great Expectations*, chap. v.

74. **but a span**, only a handbreadth, of momentary
duration.

"Behold, thou hast made my days as it were a *span* long: and mine
age is as nothing in respect of thee; and verily every man living is
altogether vanity." *Psalm* 89,6. Prayer Book Version.

Iago's song inculcates the motto, "a short life and a merry." Cp.
"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." *1 Corinthians*, 15,32.

79. **potting**, emptying pots of liquor.



and your swag-bellied Hollander—Drink, ho!— 80
are nothing to your English.

Cas. Is your Englishman so expert in his drinking?

Iago. Why, he drinks you, with facility, your Dane 85
dead drunk; he ^{difficult}sweats not to overthrow your
Almain; he gives your Hollander a vomit
ere the next pottle can be filled.

Cas. To the health of our general!

Mon. I am for it, lieutenant; and I'll do you 90
justice.

80. **swag-bellied**, paunchy, having a protruding or a swinging belly.

84. **he drinks you.** Ethic dative. Cp. l. 1. 49.

The social custom known as the drinking-bout is exposed by Shakespeare in this passage. The winner in these contests was the seasoned toper who continued at his cups after his companions were all sprawling on the floor. This is the theme of a well-known drinking-song of Burns's, ending with the lines:

The last beside his chair to fall—
He is the king among us three.

Cleopatra boasts of being a more seasoned toper than Antony (*Ant. and Cleop.*, 2. 5. 21):

Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed.

The story of Shakespeare's drinking-bout at Bidford is a foolish 18th century fabrication.

85. **he sweats not...Almain**, it costs your Englishman no trouble to drink your German down. *Almain*

87. **pottle**, tankard (see 56, above).

89. **I'll do you justice**, This, like "I'll do you right" (see 2 *Henry IV*, 5. 3. 76), was a common formula used in pledging healths.



Iago. O sweet England !

“ King Stephen was and-a worthy peer,
His breeches cost him but a crown ;
He held them sixpence all-too dear,
With that he call'd the tailor lown.

95

“ He was a wight of high renown,
And thou art but of low degree.
’Tis pride that pulis the country down ;
Then take thy auld cloak about thee.”

Some wine, ho !

100

Cas. Why this is a more exquisite song than the other.

Iago. Will you hear’t again ?

Cas. No ; for I hold him to be unworthy of his place that does those things. Well, God’s

105

92-99. These stanzas are taken from an old ballad, “ Take thine old cloak about thee,” which may be found in Percy’s *Reliques*.

A peasant complains to his wife that his jacket is full of holes and begs her to consent to his getting a new one. She flouts at this extravagant notion (as she thinks it) and reminds him that King Harry of England [not King Stephen as here] spent only a crown on his breeches, and thought them too dear even at that. Thus admonished, the husband consents to “ take his old cloak about him.”

92. **and-a.** This redundant “ and ” is common in ballad-poetry and gives a pleasant swing or “ lilt ” to the melody.

Cp. *Twelfth Night*, 5. 1. 398 : When that I was *and-a* little tiny boy.
And *King Lear*, 3. 2. 74 : He that has *and-a* little tiny wit.

94. **all-too** : an intensive form of “ too,” as in “ *all-too* soon.”

95. **lown**, man of low degree (the same word as “ loon ”)
Cp. “ Both lord and *lown*,” *Pericles*, 4. 6. 10.

above all; and there be souls must be saved,
and there be souls must not be saved.

Iago. It's true, good lieutenant.

Cas. For mine own part,—no offence to the
general, nor any man of quality,—I hope to 110
be saved.

Iago. And so do I too, lieutenant.

Cas. Ay, but by your leave, not before me; the
lieutenant is to be saved before the ancient.
Let's have no more of this; let's to our affairs. 115
—God forgive us our sins!—Gentlemen,
let's look to our business. Do not think,
gentlemen, I am drunk. This is my ancient;
this is my right hand, and this is my left. I
am not drunk now; I can stand well enough, 120
and I speak well enough.

Gent. Excellent well.

Cas. Why, very well then; you must not think
then that I am drunk. *Exit.*

110. **quality**, rank, gentility.

115. **let's to our affairs.** The hour of respite (mentioned by Iago in line 13, above) is now past, and though Cassio has certainly drunk too much, it would be too much to say that he is entirely lost to all sense of his military responsibilities. At this point in the proceedings he rises from table and begins with difficulty to make for the door. His maundering conversation betrays the muddled state of his brains.

120. **I can stand well enough.** "The great secret of delineating intoxication on the stage is the endeavour to stand straight when it is impossible to do so." Kean (the actor).

Mon. To the platform, masters; come, let's set
the watch. 125

Iago. You see this fellow that is gone before :

He is a soldier fit to stand by Cæsar

And give direction ; and do but see his vice.

'Tis to his virtue a just equinox,

The one as long as the other ; 'tis pity of
him. 130

I fear the trust Othello puts him in,

On some odd time of his infirmity,

Will shake this island.

Mon.

But is he often thus ?

124. **the platform**, the terrace overlooking the sea, upon which guns were mounted.

127. **He is...fit to stand by Caesar.** " Compare with this Iago's disparagement of Cassio in the opening scene of the play, and see how, for his purposes, he can praise or dispraise. To Roderigo he can lie one way, to Montano another ; equally false, perhaps, the very low or very high estimates of Cassio's soldiership." Clarke.

129. **to his virtue...equinox**, Just as night and day are equal at the equinox, so Cassio's *vice* is equal to his *virtue*—the one exactly counterbalances the other. For **just** = exact, cp. 1. 3. 5.

There are two equinoxes in the year ; the vernal equinox, 20 March, and the autumnal equinox, 22 or 23 September. These dates coincide with the time when the sun, in its path round the heavens, crosses the equator, producing the phenomenon of equal day and night all the world over.

130. **pity of him**, a pity for him. Cp. 4. 1. 206.

133. **will shake this islands.** The very thing Iago is endeavouring to do : cp. 63, above.

Iago. 'Tis evermore his prologue to his sleep.
He'll watch the horologe a double set, 135
If drink rock not his cradle.

Mon. It were well
The general were put in mind of it.
Perhaps he sees it not; or his good nature
Prizes the virtue that appears in Cassio,
And looks not on his evils. Is not this true? 140

Enter Roderigo.

Iago. [*Aside to him.*] How now, Roderigo!
I pray you, after the lieutenant; go. *Exit Roderigo.*

Mon. And 'tis great pity that the noble Moor
Should hazard such a place as his own second 145
With one of an ingraft infirmity:
It were an honest action to say
So to the Moor.

134. **prologue**: cp. 2. 1. 263.

135. **He'll watch ... cradle**, he will keep awake for twenty-four hours—while the hour-hand goes twice round the dial,—if he have no drink to rock his brains to sleep.

Stage-direction. Iago here sends out Roderigo to go after Cassio and carry out instructions previously given (2. 1. 273-280). The scuffle follows almost immediately.

144. **his own second**, the place nearest his person, *viz.*, that of lieutenant.

145. **ingraft**. "rooted, . settled in his constitution," (Johnson).

Cp. *Julius Caesar*, 2. 1. 184: "The *ingrafted* love he bears to Caesar."

Iago. Not I, for this fair island.

I do love Cassio well ; and would do much
To cure him of this evil.—But hark ! what
noise ? *[Cry within : “ Help ! help ! ”]*

Re-enter Cassio, pursuing Roderigo.

Cas. 'Zounds, you rogue ! you rascal !

Mon. What's the matter, lieutenant ? 150

Cas. A knave teach me my duty !

I'll beat the knave into a twiggen bottle.

Mod. Beat me !

Cas. Dost thou prate, rogue ?

[Beating Roderigo.]

Mon. Nay, good lieutenant ;

[Staying him.]

I pray you, sir, hold your hand.

Cas. Let me go, sir,

Or I'll knock you o'er the mazzard.

152. **into a twiggen bottle**, till he resemble a twiggen bottle, *i.e.* one cased in a net-work of twigs. Bottles of the kind would be lying in plenty about the stage.

The Quarto reads “ a wicker bottle,” giving the same meaning. The usual phrase to-day is “ to knock into a cocked hat,” (but the Americans prefer “ to beat into a frazzle ”), meaning “ to double-up in a fight,”—which is just what Cassio threatens to do with Roderigo.

In French editions of this play (Hugo, Morel) we have come across a quite different interpretation : “ *Je battrai le coquin jusqu'à le faire entrer dans . . .* ” = I'll beat the fellow till he *escapes for safety* into a twiggen bottle.”

154. **hold your hand**, forbear your blows.

155. **the mazzard** : jocular for the head.

Mon. Come, come, you're drunk. 155

Cas. Drunk ! *They fight.*

Iago. [*Aside to Roderigo.*] Away, I say ; go out, and cry
a mutiny. *Exit Roderigo.*

Nay, good lieutenant,—God's will, gentlemen ;—

Help, ho !—Lieutenant,—Sir Montano, sir ;—

Help, masters !—Here's a goodly watch indeed !

Bell rings.

Who's that which rings the bell ?—Diablo, ho ! 160

The town will rise. God's will, lieutenant, hold !

You will be sham'd for ever.

Re-enter Othello and Attendants.

Oth. What is the matter here ?

156. **a mutiny**, a riot, a public disturbance (2. 1. 292).

158. **Sir Montano**. "Iago is pretending to separate the lieutenant and Montano, but he is not familiar with Montano, the ex-governor, and he gives him a title of courtesy." Knight.

[*"Sir Montano,"*—the reading of Quarto and Folio here and in 166, below—has been variously altered in modern editions on the very inadequate ground that there is no evidence that the ex-governor has a claim to this title.]

159. *Bell rings*. This is doubtless done by Roderigo under directions from Iago.

It is not the first time that Iago has given the same orders to the same accomplice with the same end in view (1. 1. 90). The bell immediately awakens Othello.

160. **Diablo** is the Spanish word for Devil. The Italian (which we should have expected from Iago) is Diávolo.



Mon. 'Zounds, I bleed still ; I am hurt to the death.

He dies !

Oth. Hold, for your lives ! 165

Iago. Hold, ho ! Lieutenant,—Sir Montano,—gentlemen,—

Have you forgot all sense of place and duty ?

Hold ! the general speaks to you ; hold, for shame !

Oth. Why, how now, ho ! from whence ariseth this ?

Are we turn'd Turks, and to ourselves do that 170

Which Heaven hath forbid the Ottomites ?

For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl.

He that stirs next to carve for his own rage

Holds his soul light ; he dies upon his motion.

Silence that dreadful bell ; it frights the isle 175

From her propriety. What is the matter, masters ?

Honest Iago, that looks dead with grieving,

170-171. **Are we turn'd Turks?** Have we completely changed our natures? **hath forbid the Ottomites**, viz., by the segregation of their fleet, which has made it impossible for the Turks to do them any farther harm.

"Shall we draw our weapons against each other, so soon after Divine Providence has rescued us from the hands of our enemies?"

172. **put by**, desist from, put a stop to.

173. **carve for**, gratify, indulge.

174. **light**, of little value. **upon his motion**, the moment he stirs.

176. **her propriety**, her natural state, her normal quiet.

177. **Honest Iago**. "'Honest' is the word that springs to the lips of everyone who speaks of him. It is applied to him some 15 times in the play, not to mention some half-dozen where he employs it, in derision, of himself." Bradley.

that looks dead with grieving. Cp. note on 3. 3. 3.

Speak, who began this ? On thy love, I charge thee.

Iago. I do not know. Friends all but now, even now,

In quarter, and in terms like bride and groom 180

Devesting them for bed ; and then, but now

(As if some planet had unwitted men)

Swords out, and tilting one at other's breast,

In opposition bloody. I cannot speak

Any beginning to this peevish odds ; 185

And would in action glorious I had lost

Those legs that brought me to a part of it !

Oth. How comes it, Michael, you are thus forgot ?

Cas. I pray you, pardon me ; I cannot speak.

Oth. Worthy Montano, you were wont be civil ; 190

The gravity and stillness of your youth

The world hath noted, and your name is great

180. **In quarter**, on good terms. But some take it to mean "at our posts." **groom**, bridegroom.

181. **devesting them**, undressing themselves.

182. **had unwitted men**, had deprived men of their senses.

The supposed influences of the heavenly bodies on human affairs are often alluded to in Shakespeare : Cp. 5. 2. 109, below, and *Winter's Tale*, 2. 1. 105 : "There's some ill planet reigns."

185 **this peevish odds**, this senseless quarrel.

188. **are you thus forgot**, have you thus forgotten yourself.

190. **were won't be civil**, have always conducted yourself like a good citizen. ("To" is sometimes omitted before the infinitive).

191. **stillness**, peaceableness, staidness. *Calinness*



In mouths of wisest censure. What's the matter,
That you unlace your reputation thus,
And spend your rich opinion for the name 195
Of a night-brawler? Give me answer to it.

Mon. Worthy Othello, I am hurt to danger.
Your officer, Iago, can inform you—
While I spare speech, which something now offends
me—
Of all that I do know ; nor know I aught 200
By me that's said or done amiss this night ;
Unless self-charity be sometimes a vice,
And to defend ourselves it be a sin
When violence assails us.

Oth. Now, by heaven,

193. **in mouths.....censure**, in the opinion of the
best judges: *e.g.*, the Duke of Venice (1. 3. 224). *now censure = bad
criticism*

194. **unlace**, undo, loosen (with reference to the lace
which attached hose to doublet).

195. **spend your rich opinion**, forfeit that deservedly
high repute of yours.

199. **something now offends me**, causes me some phy-
sical discomfort. *painful*

Othello is therefore obliged to fall back upon Iago for a report of
the disturbance that has taken place.

202-203. **self-charity**, self-regard (without the censure
implied in "selfishness"). He had only defended himself
when attacked. **it** is redundant.

205-217. "In this speech Iago learns, if he has not learnt before,
that it is possible for the calm and steady Moor to yield to fits of rage,

My blood begins my safer guides to rule ; 205
 And passion, having my best judgement collied,
 Assays to lead the way. If I once stir, *moved*
 Or do but lift this arm, the best of you
 Shall sink in my rebuke. Give me to know *filled with anger at the terrible punishment wh. I shall inflict*
 How this foul rout began, who set it on ; 210
 And he that is approv'd in this offence, *proved guilty*
 Though he had twinn'd with me, both at a birth,
 Shall lose me. What ! in a town of war,
 Yet wild, the people's hearts brimful of fear,

and that to induce such fits will contribute greatly to the attainment of his own wicked ends." Miller.

205. **My blood** etc. My passionate feelings begin to get the upper hand of my sense and judgment. Cp. 1. 3. 123. **safer** = saner, sounder: cp. "Are his wits *safe*?" 4. 1. 280.

206-207. **collied**, obscured; literally blackened by coal or smut. Cp. "the *collied* night." *Mids. N. Dream*, 1, 1, 145. **Assays**, attempts.

209. **sink in**, quail or cower beneath.

210. **foul rout**, *Indecorous Quarrel* disgraceful uproar. **set it on**, began it, instigated it. Cp. 5. 2. 187; and 329.

211. **approv'd in this offence**, proved guilty of this misdemeanour.

212. **had twinn'd with me**, were my own twin brother. **a** = one. (Cp. 318, below).

213. **lose me**, forfeit my favour.

214. **wild**, wild with excitement. **brimful of fear**, still afraid of the Turkish menace.



To manage private and domestic quarrel, *find occasion for*
In night, and on the court and guard of safety !

'Tis monstrous. Iago, who began't ?

Mon. If partially affin'd, or leagu'd in office,
Thou dost deliver more or less than truth,
Thou art no soldier.

Iago. Touch me not so near. 220

I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth
Than it should do offence to Michael Cassio ;
Yet, I persuade myself, to speak the truth *conflict bet the higher*
Shall nothing wrong him. Thus it is, general : *lower reason*

216. the court and guard of safety, "the very spot and guarding-place of safety." Clarke.

218. If partially affin'd, etc., if you deviate from the truth either from the partiality of friendship or from regard for the service to which you both belong. (French *affiné*=joined in affinity).

220. Touch me not so near, etc. Speaking as a man of feeling, Iago complains that Montano's caution has wounded his sensibilities,—besides, of course, being perfectly gratuitous. *Do not ask me about that which is very true*

223-224. to speak...wrong him. Iago's accusation is delivered in the form of an apology. An English poet has truly said that "the deepest wounds are given by praise."

224-246. Thus it is, general. "Iago's thoroughly lying account of the incidents that occurred, with his art in seeming to 'mince' the 'matter' and make 'it light to Cassio,' while in fact contriving to give all possible heightening touches to his misdeed, is most skilfully managed in this speech. It will be remembered that far from pursuing Roderigo and returning to the scene of the conflict, Iago never stirs from the spot, but remains to direct the movements of his

Montano and myself being in speech, 225
 There comes a fellow crying out for help ;
 And Cassio following him with determin'd sword,
 To execute upon him. Sir, this gentleman
 Steps in to Cassio and entreats his pause ;
 Myself the crying fellow did pursue, 230
 Lest by his clamour (as it so fell out)
 The town might fall in fright. He, swift of foot,
 Outran my purpose ; and I return'd the rather
 For that I heard the clink and fall of swords,
 And Cassio high in oath ; which till to-night 235
 I ne'er might say before. When I came back
 (For this was brief) I found them close together,
 At blow and thrust ; even as again they were
 When you yourself did part them.

puppets, and prompts them in the parts which he has previously designed that they should perform ; and that instead of Cassio's having been ' high in oath,' he has given vent to nothing more offensive in speech than the threats, ' I'll beat the knave into a twiggen bottle' and ' I'll knock you o'er the mazzard.' " (Clarke).

226. **a fellow.** Roderigo. Iago shields him, for he has some farther use for him.

228. **execute upon him,** wreak revenge upon him.
this gentleman : indicating Montano.

229. **entreats his pause,** implores him to desist.

232. **fall in fright,** take alarm, become panic-stricken.

235. **Outran my purpose,** outran me, so that I could not accomplish my purpose. Pregnant construction. **the rather,** the sooner.

238. **at blow and thrust,** at cut and thrust, in a hand to hand struggle.



More of this matter cannot I report. 240

But men are men ; the best sometimes forget.
Though Cassio did some little wrong to him,
(As men in rage strike those that wish them best),
Yet surely Cassio, I believe, receiv'd
From him that fled some strange indignity 245
Which patience could not pass.

Oth. I know, Iago,
Thy honesty and love doth mince this matter,
Making it light to Cassio. Cassio, I love thee ;
But never more be officer of mine.

Re-enter Desdemona, attended.

Look, if my gentle love be not rais'd up ! 250
I'll make thee an example.

Des. What's the matter, dear ?

Oth. All's well now, sweeting ; come away to bed.—

Sir, for your hurts, myself will be your surgeon.—

[*To Montano, who is led off.*]

Lead him off.

Iago, look with care about the town, *Petrol* 255

241. **Forget**, forget themselves.

244. **I believe**. " This is said to attenuate the effect of the too favourable **surely**." Morel.

245. **indignity**, insult. 246. **pass**, tolerate.

247. **mince the matter**, extenuate it, make light of it.

252. **sweeting**, sweetheart.

" Sweeting " is a diminutive of " sweet," as " darling " is of " dear."

255. Iago from now is Othello's lieutenant in all but the name.



And silence those whom this vile brawl distracted.
Come, Desdemona ; 'tis the soldiers' life
To have their balmy slumbers wak'd with strife.

Exeunt all but Iago and Cassio.

Iago. What, are you hurt, lieutenant ?

Cas. Ay, past all surgery.

260

Iago. Marry, God forbid !

Cas. Reputation, reputation, reputation ! Oh, I have ^{higher part} lost my reputation ! I have lost the immortal part ^{spiritual} of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation !

265

Iago. As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound ; there is more sense

259-341. Cassio, now entirely sobered by a sense of his disgrace, comes and laments to Iago his loss of reputation, and curses the invisible spirit of wine that had stolen away his brains and transformed him for a time into a beast. Iago affects to make light of the matter, tells him that he has been dismissed in a flash of anger, and points out that there are ways to recover the Moor. Cassio says it will be impossible for him to ask Othello for his place again, for his general will tell him he is a drunkard ; so Iago advises him to put his case before Desdemona, who will readily undertake a good office of this nature ; and predicts that the crack in their love will be made stronger than before. Cassio readily accepts this advice as a proof of love and honest kindness on Iago's part.

260. **past all surgery**, *i.e.*, incurably, irremediably.

262. **Reputation, reputation, reputation.** Othello's reproof (see 194, above) has entered his soul and he thinks more about his fault than about the loss of his lieutenancy.

Oh. See note on 3. 2. 180.

265. **bestial**, brutish ; see 294, below.

in that than in reputation. Reputation is an idle and most false imposition ; oft got without merit, and lost without deserving. You have lost no reputation at all, unless you repute yourself such a loser. What, man ! there are ways to recover the general again. You are but now cast in his mood, a punishment more in policy than in malice ; even so as one would beat his offenceless dog to affright an imperious lion. Sue to him again, and he's yours. 270 275

267. **more sense in that.** Iago means that a bodily wound causes more suffering than a wound to the reputation. "Sense" = sensation.

269. **imposition,** a thing thrust upon a person to which he has no claim. Latin *impositio*, a laying on.

The modern meaning of "imposture," "fraud," is later than Shakespeare ; hence the qualifying word **false**, which now sounds tautological.

272. **What, man !** Cheer up ! Iago often uses "man" in a sense like "brother" : cp. 45, above, and 319, below.

recover, get back the friendship of : cp. "lose," 213, above.

273. **cast in his mood,** dismissed in his anger. *vened*

For this sense of "mood" cp. *Two Gent.*, 4. 1. 51 : "A gentleman, whom in my mood I stabb'd unto the heart." For "cast" see 1. 1. 150 and 5. 2. 327.

276. **beat his offenceless dog.....lion.** The meaning of this saying is "to punish a mean man in the presence of, and for an example to, a great one."

Cassio is the dog, and *Cyprus* is the lion. The point of the proverb is seen in the immediately preceding words, "a punishment more in policy than in malice."



Cas. I will rather sue to be despised than to deceive
so good a commander with so slight, so drunken,
and so indiscreet an officer. Drunk? and speak 280
parrot? and squabble? swagger? swear? and
discourse fustian with one's own shadow? O thou
invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be
known by, let us call thee devil!

Iago. What was he that you follow'd with your 285
sword? What had he done to you?

Cas. I know not.

Iago. Is't possible?

Cas. I remember a mass of things, but nothing
distinctly; a quarrel, but nothing wherefore. 290
O God! That men should put an enemy in their
mouths to steal away their brains! That we

279. so slight, so light-minded, so fickle an officer
as myself.

281. speak parrot, talk nonsense. swagger, play the
bully.

282. discourse fustian, utter words void of sense.

"Fustian" meant originally a kind of cotton, and is said to have
received this name from Fustat, a suburb of Cairo, where it was
manufactured. Cp. "bombast," 1. 1. 13.

with one's own shadow: mistaking the shadow for
a human being.

290. but nothing wherefore, but I have no recollection
of the cause of the quarrel.

291-292. That men, etc. How strange, or how foolish,
that men, etc.



should, with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause,
transform ourselves into beasts!

Iago. Why, but you are now well enough. How 295
came you thus recovered?

Cas. It hath pleased the devil drunkenness to
give place to the devil wrath. One imperfect-
ness shows me another, to make me frankly
despise myself. 300

Iago. Come, you are too severe a moraler. As the
time, the place, and the condition of this coun-
try stands, I could heartily wish this had not
befallen; but, since it is as it is, ^{bring about} mend it for ^{reasonable}
your own good. 305

Cas. I will ask him for my place again; he shall
tell me I am a drunkard! Had I as many
mouths as Hydra, such an answer would stop

293. **pleasance**, pleasure, gaiety: cp. *P. Pilgrim*, 158:

"Youth is full of *pleasance*, age is full of care."

299. **unperfectness**, ^{one flaw in my character reveals another} imperfection. **frankly**, ^{visibly} openly,
unreservedly.

301. **moraler**, moralizer. *Goody Goody*.

the time, the place. Cp. 213-214. Notice the delight
Iago takes in calling to mind these unpleasant facts, by way
of "rubbing in" the offence.

306. **I will ask.** How shall I *bring* myself to ask...?

Hydra. This was a nine-headed monster that ravaged
the country of Lernia, the slaying of which was the second
of the twelve labours of Hercules.

It had nine heads, and it was said that for every head struck off
two fresh ones instantly made their appearance.

them all. To be now a sensible man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast! O strange! 310
Every inordinate cup is unbless'd and the ingredient is a devil.

Iago. Come, come, good wine is a good familiar creature, if it be well used; exclaim no more against it. And, good lieutenant, I think you think I love you. 315

311. **every inordinate cup**, each cup too many. "Inordinate" = superfluous, excessive. Latin *inordinatus*, not in order. **the ingredient**, that which forms its chief ingredient, the alcohol, the spirit.

315. **a good familiar creature**. A humorous description of intoxicating drink. Cp. 2 *Henry IV*, 2. 2. 13: "the poor creature, small beer."

Cp. "My master took too much of the creature last night." Dryden, *Amphitryon*, 3. 1. "He [Whitefield the Evangelist] seems to like a bit of the cretur as well as other folks." Graves, *Spiritual Quixote*. "Take off this measure...of the comfortable creature which the carnal do denominate brandy." Scott, *Old Mortality*. "He produced two bottles of brandy...so we passed the creature round, and tried all we could do to while away the tedious night." M. Scott, *Tom Cringle's Log*. "You've been takin' a dhróp o' the crathur." Tennyson, *Tomorrow*.

The example from *Othello* is cited by Sir James Murray in the *Oxford Dictionary*; and Dr. Craigie has very kindly drawn our attention to the citation of the example from 2 *Henry IV* in *Slang and its Analogues* (7 vols.). But it is here pointed out for the first time (as far as we know) that Shakespeare has *two* instances of this peculiar idiom.

It should be noted that "ea" was formerly sounded as in "great" (just as "tea" rhymes with "obey" in Pope's well-known couplet), so that Iago's pronunciation of "creature" would have the drawling sound which lends it half of its humour when we hear it pronounced by drouthy Irishmen or Scotchmen to-day. Cp. "cretur" and "crathur" in the citations from Graves and Tennyson.

Cas. I have well approved it, sir. I drunk!

Iago. You or any man living may be drunk at a time, man. I'll tell you what you shall do. Our general's wife is now the general;—I may say so in this respect, for that he hath devoted and given up himself to the contemplation, mark, and denotement of her parts and graces;—confess yourself freely to her; importune her help to put you in your place again. She is of so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition, she holds it a vice in her goodness not to do more than she is requested. This broken joint between you and her husband entreat her to splinter; and, my fortunes against

316. **at a time**, at one time or other. Cp. "at a birth," 212, above.

317. **approv'd**, proved.

320. **the general**, *i.e.*, the general's general: cp. 2. 1. 74.

323. **denotement**, close scrutiny.

Quarto and Folio have "deuotement" (=devotement).

325. **confess yourself freely to her**. The language is that of the Catholic Church, and the underlying idea is that of the intercession of the saints.

"If Othello appears to you to be so forbidding and unapproachable, you will allow that Desdemona, at any rate, is gentle and easily to be entreated. Why not therefore go to *her* and ask *her* to act the part of intercessor?"

326. **so free...so apt**, so candid...so accessible. **so blessed a disposition**. Contrast this with Iago's words to Roderigo in 2. 1. 254, above.

329. **splinter**, put into splints, mend.

any lay worth naming, this crack of your love shall grow stronger than it was before.

Cas. You advise me well.

Iago. I protest, in the sincerity of love and honest kindness.

Cas. I think it freely; and betimes in the morn- 335
ing I will beseech the virtuous Desdemona
to undertake for me. I am desperate of my
fortunes if they check me here.

Iago. You are in the right. Good-night, lieutenant; I must to the watch. 340

This word as we now use it means invariably "shiver," "rend into splinters."

330. **any lay**, any bet, any wager. **this crack in your love**, i.e., this breach, this fracture. **grow stronger**: elliptical for "cause it to grow stronger." Cp. 2 Henry IV, 4. 1. 222:

Our peace will, like a broken limb united,
Grow stronger than before.

Iago's metaphor takes us back to Cassio's complaint, at the beginning of their interview, that he was "past all surgery" (260).

335. **I think it freely**. "Ay, and who but the reader of the play could think otherwise?" Coleridge.

337. **to undertake for me**, to intercede for me, to take up my cause.

338. **desperate**, hopeless. **check**, arrest.

340. **I must to the watch**. Iago had been instructed to patrol the town.

342-368. This is Iago's third soliloquy. Dr. Moulton sums it up as "a rhapsody of self-appreciation."—Iago is delighted at his own cleverness



Cas. Good-night, honest Iago.

Exit.

Iago. And what's he then that says I play the villain?

When this advice is free I give and honest,

Probal to thinking, and indeed the course

To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy 345

The inclining Desdemona to subdue

In any honest suit; she's fram'd as fruitful

As the free elements. And then for her

To win the Moor, were't to renounce his baptism,

All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,

350

in being able to give his extremely treacherous advice to Cassio such an appearance of honesty and plausibility. When he asks himself,—

What's he then that says I play the villain?—

we can almost imagine Mr. Hyde standing in front of his mirror and beholding in it, instead of his own deformed features, the radiant form of Dr. Jekyll the philanthropist (cp. note on 4. 2 134).

The inner workings of the arch-villain's mind are nowhere more clearly disclosed than in this monologue. Now for the first time the whole sweep of his plot is revealed to himself as he thinks over the complications to which Desdemona's honest mediation can be made to lead—and he sees that his net will be big enough to enclose all his victims at once within its meshes.

From whence could such an infernal idea have arisen but from the pit of hell? Iago, it must be allowed, gives the devils their full share in the glory of it (356).

344. **probal to thinking**, easy of belief.

“Probal” is found only here: it seems to be an abbreviation of “probable” or “provable.”

346. **inclining**, easily moved to pity.

347. **as fruitful...elements**, “liberal, bounteous as the elements, out of which all things are produced.” (Johnson.)

350. **All seals...sin**, the holiest rites of his religion.

His soul is so enfetter'd to her love,
 That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
 Even as her appetite shall play the god
 With his weak function. How am I then a villain
 To counsel Cassio to this parallel course, 355
 Directly to his good? Divinity of hell!
 When devils will the blackest sins put on,
 They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
 As I do now; for whiles this honest fool
 Plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes 360
 And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,
 I'll pour this pestilence into his ear,

351. **enfetter'd**, fettered. *chained*.

This play contains an unusual number of words of this formation ("enshelter'd," "embay'd," "enchafed," "ensteep'd," "enclog," and "enmesh"—and others in later scenes).

354. **Even as...function**, according as her caprice shall exercise its fascination over his weaker nature.

355. **this parallel course**, "this course level or even with his design" (Johnson).

356. **Divinity of hell!** An invocation of the powers and workings of the infernal world. See note on 1. 3. 364, above.

"He recognizes the full devilry of his project without being induced to hesitate for a moment about carrying it into effect." Miller.

357. **When devils...put on**, "When devils mean to instigate men to commit the most atrocious crimes" (Malone).

For "put on" = "instigate" cp. "putting on," 2. 1. 313; and for "suggest" = "tempt," cp. *Two Gent.* 3. 1. 34: "Tender youth is soon suggested."

360. **Plies**, solicits: cp. 4. 1. 107. **repair**, renew, restore.

361. **this pestilence**, this poisonous fabrication. *Suggestion*



That she repeals him for her body's lust ;
 And by how much she strives to do him good,
 She shall undo her credit with the Moor. 365
 So will I turn her virtue into pitch, *goodness into black*
 And out of her own goodness make the net *& spirit of*
 That shall enmesh them all. *se*

Re-enter Roderigo.

How now, Roderigo!

am not playing and imp...
 Rod. I do follow here in the chase, not like a

Iago's figure suggests Lucianus' literal dropping of poison into the king's ear in Hamlet.

363. **repeals him**, *demands* his recall. French *rappeler*, to recall.

364. **by how much**, the more...the more.

366. **pitch**, a substance resembling tar ; the symbol of moral foulness.

368. **enmesh them all**. The figure of the spider (2. 1. 169) returns to the speaker's mind. *enmesh*

"Iago's mind is evermore spinning out its own contents." Hudson. His web is visibly widening out, and he hopes to entangle all his victims within it.

368-394. This is Roderigo's *third* interview with Iago. He is still wincing under the blows he had received from Cassio's cudgel, and has come to complain that, in spite of all the money he has spent, he has made no progress in his love-suit.—This interview gives us our first indication of "long-time," about which so much has been written by critics.—Iago bids Roderigo have patience, for everything is going on well. In exchange for his very small hurt, he has cashiered Cassio ; and if he only allows things to ripen he will soon see the realization of his utmost hopes. Iago compares his method of working to that of Nature, whose processes cannot be hurried.

hound' that hunts, but one that fills up the cry. 370

My money is almost spent; I have been to-
night exceedingly well cudgelled; and I think *thru*
the issue will be, I shall have so much experience
for my pains; and so, with no money at all
and a little more *from an agency* wit, return again to Venice. 375

Iago. How poor are they that have not patience!

What wound did ever heal but by degrees?

Thou know'st we work by wit, and not by witch-
craft;

And wit depends on dilatory time. *slow pace*

Does't not go well? Cassio hath beaten thee, 380

And thou, by that small hurt, hast cashier'd *dismissed*
Cassio.

370. **the cry**. This term usually means a pack of hounds, so called from their bark; but here the word means the bark itself.

"A hound that fills up the cry is not for hunting, but one who is in the pack for his voice alone. In those days a hound with fine voice was greatly appreciated." Hart.

In 2. 1. 312. Iago had made use of this hunting metaphor to describe Roderigo's pursuit of Desdemona, and Roderigo uses it now about himself. His object in coming to Cyprus was certainly something more than "to fill up the cry."

378. **we work by wit**. The inner meaning of this is lost upon Roderigo, but is understood by the audience. (Stage irony.)—The "we" has a professional touch about it. **not by witchcraft**. Iago is too intellectually proud to be a *quack*—he works (to borrow from Carlyle). "in the finitude of the known, not in the infinitude of the unknown"

379. **dilatory**, slow-moving.

381. **hast cashier'd Cassio**. Roderigo now hears this for the first time, and it is great news to him.



Though other things grow fair against the sun,
Yet fruits that blossom first will first be ripe.

Content thyself a while. By the mass, 'tis morn-
ing; *of our activities*

Pleasure and action make the hours seem short. 385

Retire thee; go where thou art billeted. *dwelling*

Away, I say; thou shall know more hereafter.

Nay, get thee gone. [*Exit Roderigo.*] Two
things are to be done:

My wife must ^{be} move for Cassio to her mistress;

I'll set her on;

390

"Roderigo shows delight at this, and is anxious to learn the particulars, but Iago urges him to go; then with triumphant haste speaks the concluding lines." Booth (the actor).

382. **grow fair against the sun**—just like fruit on a garden wall.

383. **fruits...first**, first-fruits, our earliest success, *viz.*, the dismissal of Cassio.

"Iago wants to possess Roderigo's mind with the triumph that has crowned their first step, that from thence he may take heart and hope for the rest of their course." Hudson.

384. **By the mass**. This sacramental oath is from the Quarto: the Folio has substituted "In troth." See note on l. 1. 4.

386. **Retire thee**, withdraw thyself. Reflexive. Cp. French *se retirer*.

where thou art billeted, where your quarters have been assigned you. A military phrase.

389. **move for Cassio**, plead Cassio's cause (which she will do, but not as his *accomplice*).



Myself the while to draw the Moor apart,
And bring him ^{jump} when he may Cassio find
Soliciting his wife. Ay, that's the way;
Dull not device by coldness and delay. *Exit.*

391. **Myself the while**, etc., and meanwhile it must be my part, etc. He is revolving the plot in his mind.

392. **jump**, exactly : see note on l. 3. 5, above.

Act Third

Scene I

[*Before the castle.*]

Enter Cassio, with Musicians.

Cas. Masters, play here ; I will content your pains ; *reward*
 Something that's brief ; and bid "Good morrow,
 general." *They play.*

Enter Clown.

Clo. Why, masters, have your instruments been
 in Naples, that they speak i' the nose thus ?

1. Mus. How, sir, how ?

5

This scene takes place in front of the castle on the morning following Othello's arrival in Cyprus. Acting on Iago's advice, Cassio has come hither to ask Emilia to give him advantage of some brief discourse with Desdemona alone. He brings with him a band of musicians, by way of compliment to the newly-married pair, but the clown orders them to put up their pipes and be gone. Iago now appears upon the scene and undertakes to draw the Moor out of the way during Cassio's interview with Desdemona that their converse and business may be more free. Thereupon Emilia comes out of the castle and invites Cassio to enter.

1. **Masters** : a polite form of address to inferiors.

Cp. Hamlet (to the Players) : You are welcome, masters. (*Hamlet*, 2. 2. 440).

content your pains, pay you for your trouble.

bid "Good morrow, general," i.e., greet the general with a good-morning song. "bid" = wish, as in "to bid one welcome."

Clo. Are these, I pray you, wind-instruments?

1. Mus. Ay, marry, are they, sir.

Clo. O, thereby hangs a tail.

1. Mus. Whereby hangs a tale, sir?

Clo. Marry, sir, by many a wind-instrument that 10

I know. But, masters, here's money for you;
and the general so likes your music, that he
desires you, for love's sake, to make no more
noise with it.

1. Mus. Well, sir, we will not. 15

Clo. If you have any music that may not be heard,
to't again; but, as they say, to hear music
the general does not greatly care.

1. Mus. We have none such, sir.

Clo. Then put up your pipes in your bag, and lie 20
away. Go, vanish into air, away!

Exeunt Musicians.

"The custom of awaking a couple the morning after the marriage with a concert of music is of old standing" (Brand, *Pop. Ant.*).

8. **O, thereby hangs a tail.** The clown quibbles on "tale" and "tail."

The expression "thereby hangs a tale" occurs also in *Shrew*, 4. 1. 60 and *As You Like It*, 2. 7. 28, where the sense it conveys is that some bit of gossip or scandal is connected with the matter being spoken about.

13. **for love's sake.** A phrase of adjuration or entreaty. The Quarto has "of all loves"—"the prettier phrase," says Knight.

17. **to't again.** It has been suggested that there is a play here on "toot again."

20. **put up your pipes,** etc. This was a stereotyped expression (not even yet quite obsolete) dating probably from the success of *Romeo and Juliet*. The musicians hired to play at Juliet's



Cas. Dost thou hear, mine honest friend ?

Clo. No. I hear not your honest friend ; I hear you.

Cas. Prithee, keep up thy ^{take} quilllets. There's a poor 25
piece of gold for thee. If the gentlewoman that
attends the general's wife be stirring, ^{wake} tell her
there's one Cassio entreats her a little favour of
speech. Wilt thou do this ?

Clo. She is stirring, sir. If she will stir hither, 30
I shall seem to notify unto her.

Cas. [Do, good my friend.] *Exit Clown.*

Enter Iago.

In happy time, Iago.

Iago. You have not been a-bed, then ?

wedding-feast, on hearing that ~~she~~ had died that morning, left the house of the Capulets with the stoical remark, "Faith, we must put up our pipes, and be gone" (4. 5. 96).

25. **thy quilllets**, thy quips or quibbles. The stock-in-trade of the clown.

26. This **piece of gold** is not to pay for the quilllets, but to procure access to Desdemona.

31. **seem to notify**. "An idiom intended to round off the angles of a too explicit statement."

In Shakespeare we find the phrase only in the mouths of the clowns. *Cp. Mids. N. Dream*, 3. 1. 19 : "let the prologue *seem to say*" ; and *Merch. of Venice*, 2. 4. 11 : "it shall *seem to signify*."

32. **In happy time**, well met ; a greeting to a person whom one has been wanting to see.

33. **You have not been a-bed, then?** "Cassio's not having been to bed on this night is an indication of his

Cas. Why, no; the day had broke

Before we parted. I have made bold, Iago, 35

To send in to your wife. My suit to her

Is, that she will to virtuous Desdemona

Procure me some access.

Iago. I'll send her to you presently ;

And I'll devise a mean to draw the Moor

Out of the way, that your converse and business 40

May be more free.

Cas. I humbly thank you for't. [*Exit Iago.*] I never
knew

A Florentine more kind and honest.

Enter Emilia.

Emil. Good morrow, good lieutenant. I am sorry

For your displeasure ; but all will sure be well. 45

anxiety, and Iago's question is a manifestation of his malevolence cloaked with an appearance of concern." Goll.

39. **a mean**, a means. Shakespeare sometimes uses the singular form and sometimes the plural : cp. 477, below.

43. **a Florentine**. Iago was a Venetian, and Cassio a Florentine.

Steevens writes : "All that Cassio means to say is, 'I never experienced more honesty and kindness even in any of my countrymen than in this man.'" This may be right, but it seems to throw more stress upon "A Florentine" than the rhythm can bear.

44-53. Emilia points out that Cassio's interference is quite unnecessary, seeing he has already got a warm-hearted partisan in Desdemona. Had Cassio been content to let well alone, Iago's plot would have been nipped in the bud.

45. **Your displeasure**, the displeasure you have incurred from Othello. Objective genitive.

The general and his wife are talking of it,
 And she speaks for you stoutly. The Moor replies,
 That he you hurt is of great fame in Cyprus
 And great affinity, and that in wholesome wisdom
 He might not but refuse you; but he protests
 he loves you, 50

And needs no other suitor but his likings
 [To take the safest occasion by the front]
 To bring you in again.

Cas.

Yet I beseech you,

If you think fit, or that it may be done,
 Give me advantage of some brief discourse • 55
 With Desdemon alone.

Emil.

Pray you, come in.

49-50. **affinity**, family connection. in **wholesome wisdom...refuse you**, *i.e.*, were he to act simply as prudential motives prompt him to do, he would have to refuse your request out of regard for the powerful family of the Montanoes.

51. **his likings**, his inclinations.

The rent is not irreparable; and we learn that Othello would be only too glad of a fair excuse to reinstate his friend.

52. **the safest occasion**, the fittest opportunity. **the front**, the forehead.

Like Father Time, occasion is here figured with a lock of hair in front: cp. the saying "Take time by the forelock." The French equivalent for this was probably in Shakespeare's mind = "*prendre l'occasion aux cheveux*."

56. **Desdemon**. The Folios have this form six times for the sake of the metre, but the Quartos always read "Desdemona."

57. **bestow you**, conduct you to a place.

I will bestow you where you shall have time
To speak your bosom freely.

Cas.

I am much bound to you.

[*They enter the castle together.*]

Scene II

[*A room in the castle.*]

Enter Othello, Iago and Gentlemen.

Oth. [*Giving Iago papers.*] These letters give, Iago, to
the pilot ;

And by him do my duties to Senate.

That done, I will be walking on the works ;

Repair there to me.

58. **to speak your bosom freely**, to have a confidential
talk without risk of interruption from Othello.

Othello sends off his first dispatches to the Venetian senate, and then proposes to go out of doors on a round of inspection, taking Iago (see note on 2. 3. 255) and some others along with him. There is no fighting to be done, seeing that their enemies are drowned ; but Othello, as Shakespeare portrays his hero, is a man of action whom it would be difficult to imagine for any length of time without his hands full of work. So on the morning after his landing at Cyprus we see him about to apply himself to the task of strengthening the defences of the island (which "altogether lacked the abilities that Rhodes was dressed in," 1. 3. 24-26), in view of possible future assaults by the Turkish foe.

2. **do my duties**, convey my respectful greetings.

3. **the works**, the fortifications.

4. **Repair thee**, betake thyself.



Iago. Well, my good lord, I'll do't.

Oth. This fortification, gentlemen, shall we see't? 5

Gent. We'll wait upon your lordship. *Exeunt.*

accompany.

Scene III

[*The garden of the castle.*]

Enter Desdemona, Cassio, and Emilia.

Des. Be thou assur'd, good Cassio, I will do

All my abilities in thy behalf.

Emil. Good madam, do. I warrant it grieves my
husband *assure*

As if the cause were his.

Des. O, that's an honest fellow. Do not doubt, Cassio, 5

But I will have my lord and you again

As friendly as you were.

Cas. Bounteous madam, *Succeeds*
Whatever shall become of Michael Cassio, *whether*
He's never anything but your true servant. *magnanimity*
generosity of C. s. head

1-34. Cassio, having been admitted by Emilia into Desdemona's presence, has been pressing his case for his reinstatement. He believes that Othello, whom he is afraid to face this morning, is safely out of the way; and it comes as a shock to him when Emilia suddenly announces her lord's approach.

2. All my abilities, all that it lies in my power to do.

3. grieves my husband. Cp. Othello's words (2. 3. 177):

Honest Iago, that looks dead with *grieving*.

Even Emilia completely fails to see through her husband's mask of hypocrisy.

5. Do not doubt.... But. Do not have any fear but that.

Des. I know't; I thank you. You do love my
lord;

10

You have known him long; and be you well
assur'd

He shall in strangeness stand no farther off
Than in a politic distance.

Cas.

Ay, but, lady,

That policy may either last so long,
Or feed upon such nice and waterish diet,
Or breed itself so out of circumstances,
That, I being absent and my place suppli'd,
My general will forget my love and service.

15

Des. Do not doubt that; before Emilia here

12. **He shall...distance**, he will show coldness towards you only so long as reasons of wise policy make it necessary for him to do so.

For this use of strangeness = aloofness of manner, inaccessibility, cp. *C. of Errors*, 5. 1. 295;

Why look you *strange* on me? You know me well.

13-18. "That policy or plan of his to keep me out of office may persist so long, it may either be just kept alive by slight and scanty considerations, or it may find increased justification in accidental turns of events, to such an extent that in my absence and with my place filled by another, the general will forget all about me, my loyalty, and my past service," *Imperial Shakespeare*.

19-23. Coleridge sees in this next speech "the over-zeal of innocence in Desdemona."—She is touched to the heart by Cassio's distress, and she espouses his cause with all the warmth of her sensitive and responsive nature. She has that nice appreciation of others' feelings which we are told belongs of right exclusively to women—and nobody was better aware of this soft side of Desdemona than the traitor Iago (2. 3. 346).



I give thee ^{guarantee} warrant of thy place. Assure thee, 20
 If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it ^{She knew her influence}
 To the last article. My lord shall never rest;
 I'll watch him tame, and talk him out of pa- ^{persuade}
 tience; ^{I will be continually pleased}

20. Assure thee, rest assured.

23. I'll watch him tame. I will keep him from sleep
 until I make him tame. Pregnant construction.

"It is said that the ferocity of beasts, insuperable and irreclaimable by any other means, is subdued by keeping them from sleep." Johnson. Steevens is more specific: "Hawks and other birds are tamed by keeping them from sleep, and it is to the management of these that Shakespeare alludes." Later in the scene (260) Othello compares Desdemona to a "haggard" (as an untamed hawk was called). How strange if Desdemona (anticipating his figure) should here compare Othello himself to a haggard!

In the days when falconry was a universal sport, untractable *wives* were often likened to untamed hawks. Petruchio compares his shrewish wife to a "haggard," and it will be remembered that one of his means of making his Katharina tame was to deprive her of sleep (*T. of the Shrew*, 4. 1. 196 ff.). Pandarus says to Cressida, "What, you must be watched ere you be made tame, must you?" (*T. & C.*, 3. 2. 46). So, in Gartwright's *Errant Lady*, "We'll keep you, As they do hawks, watching until you leave Your wildness." Again, in *Monsieur D'Olive*, "Your only way to deal with women and parrots is to keep them waking." Hart quotes from *Choice, Chance, and Change* (1606): "Who will not watch his hawk will never reclaim her."

In every instance we have ever come across, it is always a *wife*—never a *husband*—who is compared to a wild hawk; the reason, of course, being that only the female bird is employed for sport. Johnson, whose references to falconry are singularly full and accurate (see his note on 263, below), evidently felt some awkwardness about likening Othello to a female bird and hence his deviation—whether right or wrong—from the usual explanation.

His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift ;
 I'll intermingle everything he does 25
 With Cassio's suit. Therefore be merry, Cassio ;
 For thy solicitor shall rather die *advocate than lawyer*
 Than give thy cause away.

*Enter Othello and Iago. [For some time they remain
 at a distance.]*

Emil. Madam, here comes my lord.

Cas. Madam, I'll take my leave. *Mischievous* 30

Des. Why, stay, and hear me speak.

Cas. Madam, not now ; I am very ill at ease. *ashamed.*
 Unfit for mine own purposes.

Des. Well, do your discretion. *Exit Cassio.*

• 24. his board a shrift, his table shall be turned into
 a confessional.

Similarly Adriana proposes to turn Antipholus' board into a shrift :
C. of Errors, 2. 2. 210.

27. shall rather die. See quotation from Raleigh
 given on p. 84.

Stage-direction. The bracketed words are found in most editions
 since Theobald. Actors on the Shakespearian stage, entering from the
 rear, had some distance to advance before they could begin to speak.
 Hence we often come across the words : " Lo, where he comes !"
Cp. 330, and 4. 1. 100, below.

Iago, knowing that Cassio must now be closeted with Desdemona,
 brings back Othello (who little suspects that he is being " led by the
 nose as tenderly as asses are," 1. 3. 407) from his round of
 inspection " jump where he may Cassio find soliciting his wife" (2.
 3. 391).

33. purposes, affairs, concerns. *I am unable to
 speak on my own
 behalf.*



Iago. Ha ! I like not that. *Kind of behaviour*

Oth.

What does thou say ? 35

Iago. Nothing, my lord ; or if—I know not what.

Oth. Was not that Cassio parted from my wife ?

“ He had been up all night—had been drunk—cashiered. He sees Othello coming—his heart sinks—and he retreats in shame and fear—**unfit for his own purposes.**” Christopher North.

34-479. This section forms what is usually spoken of as the SUGGESTION SCENE, wherein lies the essence of the plot. Dr. Moulton's analysis of this part of the play is as follows :

“ Iago's skill in this is a skill that sours above analysis. It is easy to note the indirectness and affected unwillingness of his hints ; how he dares to sail close to the wind, admitting his own tendency to over-scrupulousness (145), and even, when Othello begins to boil over, warning him against jealousy (165) :

—the green-eyed monster which doth mock •

The meat it feeds on.

Or how he covers the weakness of his actual case against Desdemona until Othello is frantic with suspense, and would sooner hear evil than nothing ; how he recalls Brabantio's warning, and makes Othello's sure ground of trust—Desdemona's strange preference for himself (206, 229)—a suggestion of rank will and intemperate nature. When the suffering Othello turns upon Iago (368)—

If thou dost slander her and torture me,

Never pray more ; abandon all remorse—

Iago flings up office and everything (375), thus utilising Othello's outburst in order to speak from the standpoint of injured friendship. Finally, when the whole is complete, and Othello breaks into an oath of vengeance, the astute plotter allows himself to be swept away by the tempest he has raised, and kneeling down (462) includes himself in Othello's vow.” *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, p. 242.

35. **Ha ! I like that ! not.** This is the first drop of “the leperous distilment” which Iago is now to convey into the porches of Othello's ear. Cp. 2. 3. 362. •

Iago. Cassio, my lord! No, sure, I cannot think it,
That he would ^{sneak} steal away so guilty-like,
Seeing your coming.

Oth. I do believe 'twas he. 40

Des. How now, my lord!

I have been talking with a suitor here,
A man that languishes in your displeasure. ^{unhappy fellow who has lost your favour}

Oth. Who is't you mean?

Des. Why, your lieutenant, Cassio. Good my lord, 45

• If I have any grace or power to move you, ^{appears and pleases or if I have any influence upon you} forgive him
His present reconciliation take;

For if he be not one that truly loves you,

That errs in ^{out of ignorance} ignorance and not in cunning, ^{intentional}

I have no judgement in an honest face. 50

Prithce, call him back.

Oth. Went he hence now?

Des. Yes, faith; so humbled

That he hath left part of his grief with me, ^{this grief is so great I am sharing part of his sorrow}

To suffer with him. Good love, call him back.

Oth. Not now, sweet Desdemon; some other time. 55

Des. But shall't be shortly? ^{innocence stamped in W. 4}

Oth. The sooner, sweet, for your sake ^{will quickly}

Des. Shall't be to-night at supper?

Oth. No, not to-night.

39. **steal away.** The Quarto has "sneake away." ^{shut}

43. **in your displeasure,** owing to the loss of your favour.

47. **His present...take,** "accept the submission he makes in order to be reconciled" (Johnson).

49. **not in cunning,** not knowingly.



Des. To-morrow dinner, then ?

Oth. I shall not dine at home ;

I ^{am} meet the captains at the citadel.

Des. Why, then, to-morrow night ; on Tuesday
morn ;

60

On Tuesday noon, or night ; on Wednesday
morn.

I prithee, name the time, but let it not

Exceed three days. In faith, he's penitent ;

And yet his trespass, in our common reason—

Save that, they say, the wars must make ex-
ample

65

Out of their best—is not almost a fault

To incur a private check. When shall he
come ?

Tell me, Othello. I wonder in my soul,

What you would ask me, that I should deny,

58. **To-morrow dinner**, *i.e.*, to-morrow at noon. Cp. *C. of Errors*, 1. 2. 45.

63. **three days**. Desdemona's speech reflects the anxiety Cassio had expressed lest his general after a short time should forget his love and services (13-18).

64. **in our common reason**, *i.e.*, as drunkenness is rated among us : cp. 2. 3. 318.

65. **the wars...best**, "The severity of military discipline must not spare the *best* men of the army, when their punishment may afford a wholesome example" (Johnson).

66. **not almost...check**, hardly serious enough to deserve a private reprimand.

Or stand so mammering on. What!

Michael Cassio,

70

That came a-wooing with you, and so many a
time,

When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,

Hath ta'en your part,—to have so much to-do

To bring him in! Trust me, I could do
much, *(for such a person)*

Oth. Prithee, no more: let him come when he
will;

75

I will deny thee nothing. *There is nothing to refuse you*

Des.

Why, this is not a boon.

70. stand so mammering on, *i.e.*, hesitate as to whether you are to grant or refuse my request. *delay.*

Cp. "I stand in doubt, or in a mammering between hope and fear." Palsgrave, *Acolastus* (1540). "Neither stand in a mammering whether it be best to depart or not." Lyly's *Euphues*.

71. came a-wooing with you. She only intends to say that Cassio "played propriety" (or "gooseberry"); that he "acted as chaperon"—though her words taken too literally might mean that he came to court her on his own account.

72. When I...dispraisingly. "As if she ever spoke of him dispraisingly!—except, perhaps, for the pleasure of having her ears filled with his praises by one who 'had known him long.'" Lady Martin. Mrs. Cowden Clarke (*Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*, p. 363) speaks of this as "an ostentation of dislike assumed to veil an increasing secret preference."

73. to have...him in! To think that I should have so much trouble to persuade you to give him his place again!

76. not a boon, not to be reckoned as a boon



I am asking you to do something which will profit to you

'Tis as I should entreat you wear your gloves,
Or feed on nourishing dishes, or keep you
warm,

Or sue to you to do a peculiar profit
To your own person. Nay, when I have a
suit

80

Wherein I mean to touch your love indeed,
It shall be full of poise and difficult weighty request
And fearful to be granted. *wh. you will be afraid to grant*

Oth. I will deny thee nothing:
I in exchange for this I ask you a favour
Whereon, I do beseech thee, grant me this,
To leave me but a little to myself.

85

Des. Shall I deny you? No. Farewell, my lord.

Oth. Farewell, my Desdemona; I'll come to thee
straight. *immediately*

Des. Emilia, come.—Be as your fancies teach you; *do as you*
Whate'er you be, I am obedient. *I will carry out your bid*

Exeunt Desdemona and Emilia.

77. 'Tis as I etc. It is as if I should entreat you to do something for your own advantage.

79-80. peculiar=relating to yourself. *One own*
The words to your own person are therefore tautological.

81. to touch, to test, to bring to the proof—as metals are tested with a touchstone.

Cp. "a counterfeit.....which being touched and tried, proves valueless." *K. John*, 3. 1. 100.

82. poise. "This word, besides the sense of 'weight,' 'moment,' 'importance,' includes that of 'nice balance,' 'careful adjustment,' as by scales" (Clarke).

Temp. scene
bestirring
 Oth. Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul, 90

if I do not love you
give up loving you
 But I do love thee! and when I love thee not, then

world is for me
 Chaos is come again.

is full of darkness +
 Iago. My noble lord,—

Oth. What dost thou say, Iago? *disorder*

Iago. Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady,

Know of your love?

95

beginning
 Oth. He did, from first to last. Why dost thou ask?

just for Caprice
 Iago. But for a satisfaction of my thought;

No further harm. *There was something at the back*

Oth. Why of thy thought, Iago?

Iago. I did not think he had been acquainted with her.

Oth. O, yes; and went between us very oft. 100

now everything is made clear it has a world of meaning
 Iago. Indeed!

90. **wretch.** This word is still used in rural England as a term of endearment, sympathy, or compassion.

Cp. "I set a deal of store by Lucy, poor wratch." *Rustic Speech*, p. 84.

Perdition catch my soul. A strong formula of asseveration.

91. **when.....Chaos is come again**, if ever I should have ceased to love thee, Chaos will have come again.

Chaos was the state of disorder preceding the creation; and Othello means that, should he ever lose the love of Desdemona, such a condition of things would be reflected in his inner world of man—"there would be nothing in his mind" (as Johnson puts it) "but discord, tumult, perturbation, and confusion."

101. **Indeed!** Mr. Earle in his *Philology of the English Tongue*, says that there is not a more condensed



Oth. Indeed ! ay, indeed. Discern'st thou aught in that ?
Is he not honest ?

Iago. Honest, my lord ?

Oth. Honest ! ay, honest.

Iago. My lord, for aught I know. *not a decisive or definite answer, but as may be*

Oth. What dost thou think ?

Iago. Think, my lord ? *He is playing a double game*

Oth. Think, my lord ! 105

By heaven, he echoes me,

As if there were some monster in his thought

interjection in the whole of English literature than this one, here uttered by Iago.

"It contains in it the gist of the chief action of the play, and it implies all that the plot developes."

103. **honest.** This word has two distinct senses in our play : (1) "respectable," "honourable," "sterling," where it refers to *Iago* ; (2) "chaste," "modest," "loyal to wedlock," where it refers to *Cassio* or *Desdemona*.

Othello uses the word in sense (1) when he says (referring to Iago) "An *honest* man he is" (5. 2. 148), and in sense (2) when he says, "Why then, I think, Cassio's an *honest* man" (129, below).

104. **for aught I know.** "Iago does not answer 'no,' by which he would take upon himself the burden of evidence ; he does not answer 'yes,' by which the Moor would at once feel reassured. He gives just the very worst answer possible." Go, *Criminal Type in Shakespeare*, p. 242.

107. **some monster in his thought.** This is the monster which was engendered in Iago's mind at the end of the soliloquy in Act I.

The monster is now coming to birth, and we shall see how Iago will employ the instrumentality of Othello himself to bring it forth into the light of day.

Too hideous to be shown.—Thou dost mean something.

I heard thee say even now, thou lik'st not that,

When Cassio left my wife. What didst not like? 110

And when I told thee he was of my counsel,
Of my whole course of wooing, thou criedst,
“ Indeed !”

And didst contract and purse thy brow together,

As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain
Some horrible conceit. If thou dost love me, 115
Show me thy thought.

Iago. My lord, you know I love you.

Oth. I think thou dost ;

113. **contract and purse thy brows.** Both words mean “tighten,” “draw into wrinkles”; the facial gesture expressive of suspicion and secrecy. *to keep something valuable information within*

We do not tighten up the strings of our purses unless we have something inside worth keeping in safe custody. So too presumably with our minds.

Bacon tells us that “if a man be thought secret, it inviteth discovery; as the more close air sucketh in the more open” (*Of Simulation and Dissimulation*). Again he says (and how well Iago understands this artifice!) “Because it works better when anything seemeth to be gotten from you by question than if you offer it of yourself, you may lay a bait for a question, by showing another visage and countenance than you were wont; to the end, to give occasion for the party to ask what the matter is of this change.” (*Of Cunning*.)

115. **conceit,** idea, conception.



And, for I know thou'rt full of love and
honesty, *upright*

And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st
them breath, *don't speak at random*

Therefore these stops of thine fright me the
more;

120

For such things in a false disloyal knave

Are tricks of custom; but in a man that's just

They're close delations, working from the heart

That passion cannot rule. *They are the outpouring
speech which is not governed
by emotions*

Iago.

For Michael Cassio,

120. **these stops of thine**; these ominous pauses in
your speech. Iago's *reticence* has the effect of a *revelation*.

122. **tricks of custom**. Again it is Bacon who is
Iago's best interpreter: *ordinary occurrences past & present*

"The breaking off in the midst of that one was about to say, as if
he took himself up, breeds a greater appetite, in him with whom
you confer, to know more." (*Of Cunning*.) *(Johnson paraphrase)*

123. **close, secret. delations**, accusings, intimations,
informations. Latin, *delatio*, a denunciation.

Johnson gives the following paraphrase: "...occult and secret
accusations, working involuntarily from the heart, which, though
resolved to conceal the fault, cannot rule its passion of resentment."

It was Johnson who proposed to read "delations" (the generally
accepted text) in place of "dilations" in the Folio; the Quarto has
"denotements."

123-124. **Working from.....rule**. "Either (a)
'working from the heart that cannot control its passion of
generous indignation' [cp. Johnson, above]; or (b) 'working
from the heart that passionate impulse cannot move to speak
out unadvisedly.'" (Clarke.)

124. **For**, as for, with respect to.



as far as I can surmise
I dare be sworn—I think that he is honest.

125

Oth. I think so too.

Iago. *of I judge him from his outward appearance* Men should be what they seem ; *he is certainly honest*

Or those that be not, would they might seem
none ! *I wish they would not pretend to be honest & so deceive mankind*

Oth. Certain, men should be what they seem.

Iago. Why, then, I think Cassio's an honest man.

Oth. Nay, yet there's more in this.

130

I prithee, speak to me as to thy thinkings,

125. **sworn**—"Iago is supposed to pause at 'sworn,' and correct himself, as if he were speaking with the most scrupulous candour." (Hudson.)

127. **seem none.** Either (a) not seem honest men ; or, (b) no longer seem (or bear the shape of) men.

128. **Certain,** certainly. **should be,** are morally bound to be.

129. **Why then.....honest man.** Iago wilfully mistakes Othello's meaning, taking "should be" in the sense it has in 380, below ("Thou shouldst be honest") and again in 4. 1. 165 ("That should be my handkerchief.")

"If you are content to be guided merely by fair appearances—if you are willing to take the seeming for the real—then, I grant you, there is no difficulty in believing that Cassio is innocent."

Iago knows that Othello, in his present mood, cannot let the matter rest there ; and the Moor's next speech shows that the words meant ostensibly to soothe him and to end this painful discussion have only agitated him the more profoundly—which was just the effect Iago desired to produce.

130. **Yet there's more,** there's yet more, viz., at the back of your mind.



As thou dost ^{pondering} ruminate, and give thy worst of
thoughts

The worst of words.

Iago. Good my lord, pardon me :

Though I am bound to every act of duty,
I am not bound to that all slaves are free to. 135

Utter my thoughts? Why, say they are vile
and false ; ^{if my man's heart is a palace}

As where's that palace whereinto foul things

Sometimes intrude not? Who has a breast so

pure

But some ^{but at some time some unwholesome} uncleanly apprehensions ^{thought enter into}

Keep leets and law-days and in sessions sit 140

132. **give.....words**, speak out what you think,
do not mince matters in talking to me.

135. **I am not.....free to**, I am not bound to do
what even slaves are free either to do or not to do.

"Thought is free!" We come across this proverbial saying twice
in Shakespeare (in *The Tempest*, and in *Twelfth Night*).

136. **say**, let us say, let us suppose. Cp. 4. 3. 88
and 91.

137-141. Observe how Iago by his metaphor both
elevates himself and humbles Cassio to the dust. Iago's
mind or inner conscience is comparable to a palace of justice ;
while Cassio is the kind of vile creature whose intrusion
within the precincts of such a building is oftentimes
unavoidable.

140. **leets...law-days...sessions**. Tautology. Only
one court is referred to in this three-fold description—strictly
the manor court of earlier times,—though *any* chamber
of justice satisfies the sense of the passage.

With meditations lawful?

Oth. Thou dost conspire against thy friend, Iago,
If thou but think'st him wrong'd and mak'st his ear
A stranger to thy thoughts.

Iago. ^{Resistance to another person's words or} I do beseech you
^(perhaps with thoughts as wicked) (Though I perchance am vicious in my guess, 145

"Who has a breast so little apt to form ill opinions of others, but that foul suspicion will sometimes mix with his fairest and most candid thoughts, and erect a court in his mind, to inquire of the offences apprehended?" (Steevens.)

A 'leet' is also called a 'law-day.' This court, in whose manor soever kept, was accounted the king's court, and commonly held every half-year. It was the predecessor of the modern Police Court, and, like it, could present for trial or indict for all crimes and could summarily punish trivial ones. See *Shakespeare's England*, i. 387.

145. **vicious**, wrong, mistaken; (but not in a way to imply blame).

Just as logicians speak of arguing in a *vicious* circle, and pronounce the form of a syllogism to be *vicious*; so Iago, we believe, uses the word here in a neutral, non-committal sense. See O. E. D.

145-154. "Iago here feigns self-distrust, and confesses that he has the natural infirmity or plague of a suspicious and prying temper, that he may make Othello trust him the more strongly. So men often prate about, and even magnify their own faults, in order to cheat others into a persuasion of their own rectitude and candour." (Hudson.)

145. **Though**, since (?)

Many editors say this is the meaning, but the O. E. D. furnishes no examples to substantiate such a use of "though." No other meaning, however, will suit the construction of the period.

"The confused and imperfect construction in this speech is wonderfully managed, to give the effect of Iago's adoption of a hesitating, unwilling manner; half expressing, half suppressing his suggestions, and whetting his victim's anxiety to hear more by bidding him desire to hear no more." (Clarke.)



As, I confess, it is my nature's plague
To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy
Shapes faults that are not) that your wisdom yet,
From one that so imperfectly conceits,

Would take no notice, nor build yourself a
trouble a monument of grief. (why go to meet trouble) 150

Out of his scattering and unsure observance.

It were not for your quiet nor your good, benefit

Nor for my manhood, honesty and wisdom,

To let you know my thoughts. reveal to you all that. 1

Oth. What dost thou mean?

Iago Good name, in man and woman, dear my lord, 155

146. **my nature's plague**, a constitutional infirmity to which I am bound to confess.

147. **jealousy**, suspicion, apprehension of evil.

149. **so imperfectly conceits**, forms such imperfect conceptions.

151. **scattering observance**, random and conjectural observations. (I may prelate wh. I have supplied you)

155-161. This famous speech seems to be an amplification of a verse in *Proverbs* (22, 1): "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour than silver and gold." Many who are familiar with the passage—so often quoted apart from its context—would be surprised to be told that the words were originally spoken by an arch-villain with intent to ruin the good name of a spotless lady.

155. **and woman**. Here Iago "aims directly at Othello's heart, and plants in it the first surmise of his wife's infidelity."

Iago utters the words in a clear, deliberate tone, isolating them by a pause before and after, while Othello gazes at him in bewilderment. (See Furness.)

Is the immediate jewel of their souls.

Who steals my purse steals trash : 'tis something,
nothing ;

'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thou-
sands :

But he that ^{steals} filches from me my good name ^{Reputation}
Robs me of that, which not enriches him, ^{make him richer} 160
And makes me poor indeed.

Oth. [By heaven,] I'll know thy thoughts.

Iago. You cannot, if my heart were in your hand ;

Nor shall not, whilst 'tis in my custody.

Oth. Ha ! ^{Heart is torned asunder by passion +}

156. **the immediate...souls**, the soul's most precious possession.

157. **trash** is a word often applied contemptuously to money. ^{trifle Money is honour + wealth}

Cp. Julius Caesar, 4. 3. 26 : "...so much trash as may be grasped thus"; and *ib.* 4. 3. 74 : "...to wring from the vile hands of peasants their vile trash."

something, nothing : quite unsubstantial and illusory ; a mere bubble, which vanishes when I try to grasp it. *Cp. Merch. of Venice*, 1. 1. 35 :

And, in a word, but even now worth *this*,
And now worth *nothing*.

Some editors print "something-nothing" : *cp.* (from Tennyson's *Becket*) : "*Henry*. What did you ask her ?—*Rosamond*. Some daily something-nothing."

160. **that, which**. We retain the punctuation of Quarto and Folio, indicating the pause required by the rhythm and the sense. 163. **my heart** : as the repository of his secrets.



Iago.

Oh, beware, my lord, of jealousy;
 It is the green-ey'd monster which doth mock
 The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss
 Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;
 But, O, what damned minutes tells he o'er

165. **Oh, beware...jealousy.** Iago says all this as if in earnest care for Othello's peace of mind, though he knows that his warning against jealousy is the surest way to make Othello jealous.

166. **It is the...monster,** etc. Jealousy is likened to a tiger or cat or other beast of the feline kind that delights in sporting with its prey before devouring it. The cat is green-eyed.

166-167. **which doth mock...feeds on.** "The meat that jealousy feeds on is the *victim* of jealousy, the jealous man, who is mocked with 'trifles, light as air' (322, below)." Furness. Cp. "eaten up with passion," 391, below.

"The meaning is that jealousy is a self-generated passion; that its causes are subjective, or that it lives on what it imputes, not on what it finds. (And so Emilia afterwards describes it: "'Tis a monster begot upon itself, born on itself,' 3. 4. 161). Iago is, in his way, a consummate metaphysician, and answers perfectly to Burke's description, 'Nothing can be conceived more hard than the heart of a thoroughbred metaphysician. It comes nearer to the cold malignity of a wicked spirit than to the frailty and passion of a man.'" Hudson.

What is said here about *jealousy* is said elsewhere about *pride*: "He that is proud eats up himself." *Troilus and Cressida*, 2. 3. 164; and likewise about *anger*: "Anger's my meat; I sup upon myself, and so shall starve with feeding." *Coriolanus*, 4. 2. 50.

168. **certain of his fate,** aware of his being a cuckold. **his wronger,** his wife who wrongs him.

169. **tells he o'er,** *i.e.*, counts them out, one by one. ("Sad hours seem long.")

Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet soundly
loves !

170

Oth. O misery ! *What a miserable man I am*

Iago. Poor and content is rich and rich enough,

But riches fineless is as poor as winter *unlimited infinite*
To him that ever fears he shall be poor. *at so better to be poor than to be always be in the fear of poverty* (2) *who loves his wife but doubts her*

Good heaven, the souls of all my tribe defend 175

From jealousy !

Oth. Why, why is this ?

Think'st thou I'd make a life of jealousy, *Extracted suffering*

To follow still the changes of the moon *is a type of inconsistency*

With fresh suspicions ? No ! to be once in doubt

Is once to be resolv'd. Exchange me for a goat, 180 *stupidity*

172. **poor...enough**, poverty with contentment is
(affluence). *comparative wealth refers to class I*

173. **riches fineless**, unnumbered treasures. (Latin *finis*,
end + *less*.) **as poor as winter**,—which produces no fruits.

176-192. Othello says that a life of jealousy such as Iago has just portrayed would be utterly beyond his endurance, but he has still sufficient mental clearness to perceive that all that Iago has hitherto advanced against Desdemona is empty, insubstantial, conjectural ("ex-sufflicate and blown surmises"). That his wife is accomplished and fond of society cannot make him question her virtue,—and the fact remains that she chose him to be her husband with her eyes open. Only positive proof, therefore, (he goes on) will ever make him believe in her guilt—and then, indeed, there, will be an end at once of love and jealousy.

178. **the changes of the moon**. The jealous man may be said to measure his time by the *moon*, and his moods may be supposed to vary with her changing phases.

180. **Is once to be resolved**, is at once to be freed from uncertainty.

When I shall turn the business of my soul
 To such exsufflicate and blown surmises,
 Matching thy inference. 'Tis not to make me
 jealous *This adds to her virtue* *that she is int*
 To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
 Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well; 185
 Where virtue is, these are more virtuous.
 Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw *becom I am not a virtuous that does not me*
 The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt; *because she chose me & not competed* *worry me*

"The gist of Othello's speech is that, if once he doubts, he will make that first occasion settle the whole question for ever, by having the doubt turned into a certainty, one way or the other." Mason.

182. **exsufflicate**, *blown out as they have no depth or substance*, windy, consisting only of breath. This word (met nowhere else) is a derivative of Latin *flō*, are, to blow, and has nearly the same meaning as **blown** = inflated, empty.

"The allusion is to a bubble. 'Do not think,' says the Moor, 'that I shall change the noble designs that now employ my thoughts (**the business of my soul**) to suspicions which, like bubbles blown into a wide extent, have only an empty show without solidity; or that, in consequence of such empty fears, I will close with thy inference against the virtue of my wife.' Johnson.

183. **matching thy inference**, such as your reasoning would infer or imply.

186. **are more virtuous**, are more meritorious, set off her virtues to greater advantage (like a jewel in a rich setting).

188. **her revolt**, her inconstancy. p. Juliet's words the Friar (*Rom. and J.*, 4. 1. 58)

Ere my true heart, with treacherous revolt,
 Turn to another, etc.

For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago ;
I'll see before I doubt ; when I doubt, prove ; 190

And on the proof, there is no more but this,—

Away at once with love or jealousy ! *I will cast away her love or jealousy.*

Iago. I am glad of this, for now I shall have reason *an opportunity of displaying my affection to you*
To show the love and duty that I bear you
With frank spirit ; therefore, as I am bound, 195

Receive it from me. I speak not yet of proof.

Look to your wife ; observe her well with Cassio ; *Suspicious*

Wear your eyes, thus : not jealous, nor secure. *factfully without making a suggestion*

I would not have your free and noble nature, *don't want*

191. no more but this,—only one thing to be done.

192. The words are accompanied by the gesture he uses again in 445, below.

193-204. Iago fastens upon the *last words* of Othello's speech and distorts their meaning, interpreting them as an invitation to proceed with his accusations—only that from now onwards subjective reasons must give place to positive proofs.

"He cannot now retract his insinuations. Even if he desired, Othello will not let him. Iago, therefore, has no choice but to go forward." Maginn.

195. as I am bound, *viz.,* by my love and duty.
Cp. 1. 1. 59.

197. Look to your wife. "Drawing his voice together into a confidential intensity."

198. Wear your eye thus, carry it as I now show you.

"With a side-glance to indicate a certain degree of watchful care." Booth.

not jealous nor secure, avoiding the opposite extremes of suspicion and confidence.

Latin *securus* = free from care, negligent, reckless.



Out of self-bounty, be abus'd ; look to't. 200

I know our country disposition well ;

In Venice they do let Heaven see the pranks

They dare not show their husbands. Their best

conscience *Their highest sense of right is to con*

Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown.

Oth. Dost thou say so ? 205

Iago. She did deceive her father, marrying you ; *echoing the word*

not the doing of something wrong but to be caught

200. **self-bounty**, inherent generosity (see 1. 3. 405-406).

abus'd, deceived, imposed upon.

201. **our country disposition**, the ways of Venetian women which a foreigner like you cannot be expected to know much about.

202. **In Venice**, etc. Venice was at this time the capital of pleasure among European cities, and the reputation of her women for virtue was not high. Ben Jonson places Iago's sentiment in the mouth of Volpone, a magnifico of Venice :

" 'Tis no sin love's fruits to steal ;

But the sweet thefts to reveal :

To be taken, to be seen,

These have crimes accounted been."

" Iago classes Desdemona with the rest of her sex ; whom he, in the rankness of intellectual pride, despises as naturally frail, and denounces as naturally gross." Mrs. Cowden Clarke.

206. **she did deceive her father**. Iago recalls Brabantio's warning on the night of the elopement (1. 3. 293) :

Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see ;

She has deceiv'd her father, and may thee.

" Her duplicity must be admitted, and allowance made for it. It was wrong, but not in the least unnatural, and grievously expiated. It is part of the proof of her capacity for guilt, that she so ingeniously deceived her father." Christopher North.

And when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks,
She lov'd them most.

Oth. And so she did.

Iago. Why, go to, then.

She that, so young, could give out such a seeming,
To seel her father's eyes up close as oak— *that* 210
He thought 'twas witchcraft—but I am much
to blame.

I humbly do beseech you of your pardon

For too much loving you. *because it is really prompted by love*

Oth. I am bound to thee for ever.

Iago. I see this hath a little dash'd your spirits.

Oth. Not a jot, not a jot.

Iago. *in safe quotation* I' faith, I fear it has. 215

I hope you will consider what is spoke

208. **why, go to, then.** An interjection expressing impatience.

"Can you not follow out this clue without *my* assistance?"

209. **give out such a seeming,** act the hypocrite so cleverly.

210. **seel.** A term in falconry: to seel a hawk is to sew up its eyes. **close as oak,** close as the grain of oak.

211. Iago pauses at **witchcraft**—to give Othello time to draw the natural inference.—"Can you expect an undutiful daughter to turn out a faithful spouse? If she practised on her father, will she hesitate to practise on her husband?"

213. **I am bound to thee for ever.** Cp. 2. 1. 517.

"Notice that Othello addresses Iago in the second person singular, while Iago always uses the more respectful plural in speaking to Othello."

215. **dash'd,** daunted, abashed.



Comes from my love. But I do see you're mov'd.

bound that you will not ask me
I am to pray you not to strain my speech

To grosser issues nor to larger reach *Wider Results*

Than to suspicion. *Whatever I told you is only based on* 220 *Susp*

Oth. I will not.

Iago.

Should you do so, my lord, *If you go further*

My speech should fall into such vile success *Suspicion then may have so*

Which my thoughts aim'd not at. Cassio's my *evil result*

worthy friend,— *wh. I have meant*

My lord, I see you're moved.

Oth.

No, not much mov'd.

I do not think but Desdemona's honest.

225

Iago. Long live she so! and long live you to think so! *Long be u*

Oth. And yet, how nature erring from itself,— *may she be faithful to you*

Iago. Ay, there's the point; as (to be bold with you) *how have I err'd from the beaten track*

Not to affect many proposed matches *the impression*

Of her own clime, *disposition* complexion, and degree, 230 *declined so many*

219. **grosser**, plainer, more palpable (cp. 1. 2. 72).
issues, conclusions.

222. **success**, result (good or bad). Cp. *All's Well*,
1. 3. 255:

Would your honour

But give me leave to try success ...

225. **honest**, in the specialized sense of faithful to the
marriage tie.

229. **affect**, care for. **many proposed matches**. Cp.
1. 2. 67-68.

230. **degree**, rank. *of society*

Whereto we see in all things nature tends— *inclined + bands*

Foh! one may smell in such, a will most rank, *offensive or*
unaided but violent in her inclination
 Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural. *unfitful*

But pardon me; I do not in position *am not speaking*
generally of the
 Distinctly speak of her; though I may fear 235

Her will, recoiling to her better judgement, *after being restored to her*
woman of Venice

May fall to match you with her country forms, *are not equal*

And happily repent. *May repent of her choice*

Oth.

Farewell, farewell: *any more familiarity or suspicious*
behaviour

If more thou dost perceive, let me know more;

Set on thy wife to observe. Leave me, Iago. 240 *to be watched by a maid servant is undignified*

Iago. [Going.] My lord, I take my leave.

Oth. Why did I marry? This honest creature doubt-
 less *how I not be happy if I not married at all I have brought*
miseries

232. **Foh!** A stronger expression of disgust than the Quarto "Fie." in such (conduct). **a will most rank**, strange perversity of nature.

Iago insinuates that Desdemona's preference for Othello was due to obstinacy and self-will, allied to fickleness; not the love that endures for ever.

233. **disproportion**, disregard for the fitness of things: explained in 229-230.

234. **in position**, affirmatively, categorically.

236. **recoiling**, going back.

Cp. *Wint. Tale*, 1. 2. 154: "Methoughts I did recoil twenty-three years."

237. **match**, compare or contrast. **her country forms**, her own well set-up countrymen.

238. **happily**, haply, perhaps.

242. **This honest creature ... unfolds**. Cp. Othello's earlier utterance, 2. 3. 246-247.



Sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds. *has much more knowledge than he reveals*

Iago. [Returning.] My lord, I would I might entreat *beseech*

your honour
To scan this thing no farther; leave it to time: 245 *not examine closely but time will tell*

Although 'tis fit that Cassio have his place, *reinstated*
(For, sure, he fills it up with great ability), *capable, Right man, right time*

Yet, if you please to hold him off a while,
You shall by that perceive him and his means. *find out if he considers the pleading of his wife's best means*

Note if your lady strain his entertainment 250

With any strong or vehement importunity; *violent*
Much will be seen in that. In the mean time, *and there is a strong friendship (Iago)* *I will not let you go unless you go*

Let me be thought too busy in my fears. *My fear has made me do this*
(As worthy cause I have to fear I am) *good reason to fear that something is going wrong*

And hold her free, I do beseech your honour. 255 *consider*

Oth. Fear not my government.

Iago. I once more take my leave.

Exit.

Oth. This fellow's of exceeding honesty, *a marvelously truthful upright*

248. to hold him off a while, not to admit him to close intimacy for a time.

249. You shall ... means, "you shall discover whether he thinks his best means, his most powerful interest, is by the solicitation of your lady" (Johnson).

250. strain his entertainment, press hard for his re-admission to his pay and office. "Entertainment" was the military term for the admission of soldiers.

254. worthy, legitimate.

255. free, guiltless, innocent.

256. my government, my power to control myself. *she self to doubt not to express opinion*

And knows all qualities, with a learned spirit,
Of human dealings. If I do prove her haggard, 260
Though that her jesses were my dear heart-
strings,
I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind
To prey at fortune. Haply, for I am black

259-260. **knows ... dealing**, knows with an experienced spirit all qualities of human dealing = has a profound knowledge of human nature.

"In this passage the poet has unconsciously described himself."

260. **prove her haggard**, find her out to be a wild, unprincipled woman.

A "haggard" was a wild female hawk, which resisted all attempts to tame it and was therefore worthless for purposes of falconry. Cp. note on 25, above.

261. **though ... my dear heart-strings**, i.e., however agonizing the pain of parting with her.

The **jesses** were the straps attached to the feet of the falcon, by which it was held in hand. The **heart-strings** refer to the fibres or tenons formerly supposed to hold the heart in position.

262-265. **I'd whistle ... wind**, I would cast her off, I would repudiate her without mercy.

"The falconers always let fly the hawk against the wind; if she flies with the wind behind her she seldom returns. If, therefore, a hawk was for any reason to be dismissed, she was 'let down the wind,' and from that time shifted for herself and 'preyed at fortune.'" (Johnson).

263. **for I am black**, because of my dark complexion.

We never find "dark" in Shakespeare used to describe the countenance, but we find it in his contemporaries in the sense of "gloomy" or "louring." Cp. note on 2. 1. 132.



And have not those soft parts of conversation
 That chamberers have, or for I am declin'd 265
 Into the vale of years, (yet that's not much),
 She's gone. I am abus'd; and my relief
 Must be to loathe her. Oh curse of marriage!
 That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
 And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad 270
 And live upon the vapour of a dungeon,
 Than keep a corner in the thing I love
 For others' uses. Yet, 'tis the plague of great ones,
 Prerogativ'd are they less than the base.
 'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death. 275

264. **soft parts of conversation**, the easy manners or amenities of well-bred people. "Conversation" = manner of life, behaviour in general. *Polished manners of dandies*

265. **chamberers**, those who frequent ladies' chambers, gallants. *A coquet might (one used to keep company with ladies)*

266. **the vale of years**. Old age is compared to a valley. *Disparity of age*

267. **She's gone**, I have lost her. **abus'd**; Cp. 200, above. *She is guilty of infidelity. Dishonoured. (utterly desperate)*

x 270. **a toad**: the type of all that detestable and repulsive. It was supposed to be poisonous. *Venomous creature. Subst.*

271. **live ... dungeon**, live in a dungeon and feed upon its foul air.

274. **Prerogativ'd...base**, the great are less exempted from this infliction than those of mean birth.

The contrary opinion is laid down by Touchstone in *As You Like It* (3. 3. 56): "Horns? Even so. Poor men alone? No, no; the noblest deer has them as huge as the rascal."

275. **unshunnable**, inevitable.

More fearful than that hateful witch. I shall never wish to see a spider, snake, or any venomous thing that lives.



Even then this forked plague is fated to us
When we do quicken. Look where she comes.

Re-enter Desdemona and Emilia.

If she be false, O, then, heaven mocks itself!
I'll not believe't.

Des. How now, my dear Othello!
Your dinner, and the generous islanders
By you invited, do attend your presence. 280

Oth. I am to blame.

Des. Why do you speak so faintly?

276. **this forked plague**, horndom, cuckoldom.

The husband whose wife was unfaithful to him was said to have horns growing out of his head. "I question whether there exists a parallel instance of a phrase that (like this of "horns") is universal in all languages, and yet for which no one has discovered even a plausible origin." Coleridge.

276-277. **fated to us, when we do quicken**, destined for the great, as soon as we begin to live.

The root is A. S. *cwicu*, cognate with Latin *vivus*, Skt. *jiva*.

278. **If she be false ... mocks itself**. He is suddenly overcome by the sense of her beauty and innocence. Cp. 3. 4. 34; 4. 1. 218; 4. 2. 68, etc.

"If she be false, oh, then, even heaven itself cheats us with 'unreal mockery,' with false and specious appearances, intended only to deceive. Malone.

280. **generous**, of noble birth. Latin *generosus*.

281. **do attend your presence**, wait for you to preside at table.

282. **Why ... faintly?** "This indicates the wife's loving promptness of ear, quick to detect the slightest variation in her husband." Mrs. Cowden Clarke.



Are you not well?

Oth. I have a pain upon my forehead here.

Des. Faith, that's with watching; 'twill away again. 285

Let me but bind it hard, within this hour

It will be well.

Oth. Your napkin is too little; *Hand-Catches.*

[*He puts her handkerchief from him; and it drops.*]

Let it alone. Come, I'll go in with you.

Des. I am very sorry that you are not well.

Exeunt [*Othello and Desdemona*].

Emil. I am glad I have found this napkin; . 290

This was her *longing to get* first remembrance from the Moor. *gave to my*

My wayward husband hath a hundred times *poetic enigma*

285. **that's with watching**, that is due to too little sleep: Cp. note on 2. 3. 135.

288. **Let it alone**. When she would stoop down to pick it up, her husband forbids her.

She is fatally obedient, and her distress for her husband puts all thoughts about the treasured handkerchief out of her mind. Cp. 3. 4. 23.

"They go out together, and we may suppose that her frank, innocent demeanour and fond words reassure him for the time. I remember so well Mr. Macready's manner as we left the scene. He took my face in both his hands, looked long into my eyes, and then the old look came back into his, and it spoke as plainly as possible, 'My life upon her faith!'" Lady Martin.

290. **napkin**, handkerchief. (Now used only in the sense of "serviette.")

291. **remembrance**, keep-sake, love-token.

292. **wayward**, capricious, unaccountable. *Whimsical*

a hundred times. And yet only one night has elapsed since the celebration of their nuptials! But, as Hudson puts it, "the reckoning of time all through follows the laws of poetry, and laughs at the



Woo'd me to steal it ; but she so loves the token,
 (For he conjur'd her she should ever keep it), *always*
 That she reserves it evermore about her 295
 To kiss and talk to. • I'll have the work ta'en out, *copy out*
 And give't Iago. What he will do with it
 Heaven knows, not I ; *Blissful Ignorance (unquestioned)*
 I nothing but to please his fantasy. *have no other motive than to satisfy his obedience*

Re-enter Iago.

Iago. How now ! what do you here alone ? *ago* 300

Emil. Do not you chide ; I have a thing for you.

Iago. A thing for me ? It is a common thing—

Emil. Ha !

Iago. To have a foolish wife.

chronologists ... Shakespeare has two clocks ; one, of the understanding, another, of the imagination. • The former goes by the measures of sense ; the latter, by the measure of ideas."

293. Woo'd me to steal it, coaxed me, wheedled me into stealing it for him.

294. conjured her, *bound her by an oath or solemnly sworn* adjured her, earnestly requested her.

295. reserves it, preserves it.

So carefully had Desdemona kept an eye on it, that this was Emilia's first opportunity of stealing it.

296. ta'en out, copied in another handkerchief.

Her first idea was to have a copy made for her husband, and restore the original to Desdemona. But Iago comes in suddenly in a surly humour, and she alters her resolution in order to appease him (305).

For "take out" = "copy" cp.: "Nicophanes (the painter) gave his mind wholly to antique pictures, partly to ... take out their patterns." Holland's *Pliny*.

299. I nothing but ... phantasy. All my study is to please his whims and caprices.



Emil. O, is that all? What will you give me now 305
For that same handkerchief?

Iago. What handkerchief?

Emil. What handkerchief! •
Why, that the Moor first gave to Desdemona;
That which so often you did bid me steal. *Repeatedly*

Iago. Hast stolen it from her? 310

Emil. No, faith; she let it drop by negligence, *chance*
And, to the advantage, I, being here, took't up.
Look, here it is.

Iago. A good wench; give it me. *✓*

Emil. What will you do with't, that you have been so
earnest

To have me filch it? *steal*

Iago. [Snatching it.] Why, what is that to you?

Emil. If it be not for some purpose of import, *consequence* 316

Give't me again. Poor lady, she'll run mad

When she shall lack it. *pretend that you have no knowledge of*

Iago. Be not acknown on't; I have use for it.

Go, leave me.

Exit Emilia.

I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin, *appear like* 321

And let him find it. [Trifles light as air *insignificant proofs are to the strong powerful*

Are to the jealous confirmations strong *& cogent as good truth*

308. **that** (which). 310. **Hast** (thou). Cp. 2. 1. 260.

312. **to the advantage**, seizing my opportunity.

316. **some purpose of import**, some important purpose.

318. **lack it**, miss it, perceive its absence.

319. **Be not acknown on't**, say nothing about it to
anyone.

321. **lose this napkin**, drop it (as if by accident).

As proofs of holy writ; ^{help me in my plan} this may do something.
 The Moor already changes with my poison. ^{my poison is working on him (o)} 325

Dangerous conceits are, in their natures, poisons, ^{poisonous in the very nature}
 Which at the first are scarce found to distaste, ^{they do not realize how displeasing it}
 But with a little act upon the blood, ^{worked upon it becomes}
 Burn like the mines of sulphur. I did say so. ^{inflammable}

Re-enter Othello.

Look, where he comes! Not poppy, nor man- ^{here is the}
 dragora, ^{Iago travels over Oth. ruin & breaks his peace of mind}
^{world combined together} 330

324. **proofs of holy writ**, proof-texts from the Bible.
 See *Merch. of Venice*, 3. 2. 79.

326. **conceits**, conceptions (cp. 115, above).

327. **to distaste**, to offend the taste.

328. **act upon the blood**, action upon the blood, as it courses through the body.

329. **Burn**, gnaw the inwards, **sulphur** also called "brimstone" (= "the stone that burns").

I did say so. "Iago refers to what he has just said, viz., that dangerous imaginations, working on the blood, set it on fire. Then, the moment his eye lights on Othello, he sees that his devilish insight into things was prophetic of Othello's case; that his words are exactly verified in the inflamed looks of his victim." Hudson (*abbr.*)

330. **mandragora** is often mentioned in Elizabethan writings as a soporific medicine.

The drug was prepared from a herb with a curiously forked root known as the mandrake, or love-plant, which was popularly believed to cry aloud when pulled up. Mandragora is mentioned again in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1. 5. 4) where the Egyptian Queen on Antony's departure for Rome calls out:

Give me to drink *mandragora*,
 That I may sleep out this great gap of time
 My Antony is away.



Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow'dst yesterday.

Oth. Ha! ha! false to me?

Iago. Why, how now, general! no more of that.

Oth. Avaunt! begone! thou hast set me on the rack. 335

I swear 'tis better to be much abus'd

Than but to know't a little. *It is better to be but to shame than*

Iago. *where my disgrace by wife* How now, my lord!

Oth. What sense had I of her stolen hours of lust? *where I got*

(where she did not see the heart does not happy to
I saw't not, thought it not, it harm'd not me. *fool*

I slept the next night well, fed well, was free and

merry;

340

there was nothing to be her conduct wh. me
I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips. *no doubt that the*

of a man is robbed out if he does not know was intermed
He that is robb'd, not wanting what is stolen, *her heart*

Let him not know't, and he's not robb'd at all.

Iago. I am sorry to hear this. *put in as if he is heart*

Oth. I had been happy, *even* if the general camp, 345

331. **drowsy syrups**, decoctions taken to induce sleep.
ow'dst: ep. 1. 1. 66.

335. **Avaunt!** An exclamation usually employed in
addressing devils (*as here*) or witches (*as in C. of Errors*,
4. 3. 80; and *Macbeth*, 3. 4. 93).

the rack. Figurative, as in *Macbeth*, 3. 2. 21:

... on the torture of the mind to lie

In restless ecstasy.

336. **abus'd**, as in 267, above.

There is no need to supply such words as *and not to know it*, for
they are *implied* in Shakespeare's use of "abus'd," which even when
standing by itself is in antithetical relation to "know't a little."

338. **stolen**, secret, furtive.

345. **the general camp**, the soldiers collectively.

Pioners and all, had tasted her sweet body,
 So I had nothing known. O, now, for ever
 Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!
 Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars,
 That make ambition, virtue! O, farewell! 350
 Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
 The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,
 The royal banner, and all quality,
 Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
 And, O you mortal engines, whose rude throats 355
 The immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit,
 Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!

346. **pioners**, pioneers or sappers; soldiers of the very lowest grade.

347. **So**, provided that.

349. **plumed**, wearing gay plumes or feathers on their helmets.

350. **that make ambition, virtue**, that make a virtue of ambition.

Cp. *Antony and Cleopatra*, 3. 1. 22: "Ambition, The soldier's virtue."

352. **the ear-piercing fife**: a shrill flute played along with the **drum** in military music.

353. **all quality**, all the appurtenances.

354. **circumstance**, ceremonious ostentation.

355. **ye mortal** (= deadly) **engines**, etc., a round-about phrase for artillery.

356. **counterfeit**. Cp. "The great cannon ... Respeaking earthly thunder." *Hamlet*, 1. 2. 128.

357. **Othello's occupation's gone!** "His soul is murdered, his life-history ended, everything finished for him." Goll, *op. cit.*, 260.



Iago. Is't possible, my lord?

Oth. Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore,

Be sure of it; give me the ocular proof;

Or, by the worth of mine eternal soul, 360

Thou hadst been better have been born a dog

Than answer my wak'd wrath!

Iago. Is't come to this?

Oth. Make me to see't; or, at the least, so prove it,

That the probation bear no hinge nor loop

To hang a doubt on; or woe upon thy life!

Iago. My noble lord,—

Oth. If thou dost slander her and torture me,

Never pray more; abandon all remorse;

On horror's head horrors accumulate;

370

Do deeds to make heaven weep, all earth amaz'd;

For nothing canst thou to damnation add

360. give me the ocular proof, Othello is frantic with suspense, and would rather know the worse than remain in his present uncertainty.

362. Thou hadst been better, it would have been better for thee. 363. wak'd, awakened, aroused.

365. the probation, the proof. loop, loop-hole, opening.

369. abandon all remorse, throw off all restraints of conscience—"never care what wickedness you do" (*Lear*, 3. 7. 99).

370. "Pile one act of horror upon another, add crime to crime."

371. to make heaven weep: cp. "as make the angels weep." *Meas. for Meas.*, 2. 2. 122.

Othello is now weeping himself—he has suddenly broken from rage into tears.

Greater than that.

Iago. O grace! O Heaven forgive me!

Are you a man? Have you a soul or sense?

God be wi' you; take mine office. O wretched
fool, *that I am* 375

374. **Are you a man?** An unusual question for subaltern to address to superior. Perhaps, however, Iago is simply expressing his wonder that Othello should be in tears, that such a man as he should "play the woman with his eyes" (*Macbeth*, 4. 3. 230). *In keeping with your manly demeanor to shed tears.*

This view was suggested to us by the passage in *Romeo and Juliet* (3. 3. 108) where Friar Lawrence thus expostulates with the weeping Romeo when about to kill himself in his despair:

Hold thy desperate hand.

Art thou a man? thy form cries out thou art.

Thy tears are womanish; thy wild acts denote

The unreasonable fury of a beast.

Unseemly woman in a seeming man!

If this view is correct, it might also explain other passages later in the play where Iago again rallies Othello for taking what he considers too serious a view of so common a crime as the one he has laid to the charge of Cassio and Desdemona. Cp. "Bear your fortune like a man," 4. 1. 62; "Be a man," *ib.* 66; "A passion most unsuiting such a man," *ib.* 78; "I shall say you are...nothing of a man," *ib.* 90.

sense, mental faculty.

375. **Take mine office.** He tenders his resignation as Othello's ancient.

In this speech Iago acts the part of the injured friend, and the speech is *valedictory*. He protests that he has been quite long enough in the service of a master, who holds his honesty a vice and takes offence at his loving services.—"Slighted love is sore to bide."

375-377. **O wretched fool...O monstrous world.** He apostrophises first himself and next mankind in general.

It is only through your high sense of honesty done that which looked upon as a sin
That lov'st to make thine honesty a vice ;

O monstrous world ! Take note, take note, O world,

To be direct and honest is not safe. *(you do not be open honest)*

I thank you for this profit ; and from hence

I'll love no friend, sith love breeds such offence. *since friend understood. done with the program of all means*

[He turns to go.] *(get on)*

380

Oth. Nay, stay. Thou shouldst be honest.

Iago. I should be wise, for honesty's a fool

And loses that it works for. *(you are defeated)*

Oth. *O is in the house of a dilemma* By the world,

I think my wife be honest and think she is not ;

I think that thou art just and think thou art not. 385

I'll have some proof. Her name, that was as fresh

As Dian's visage, is now begrim'd and black

As mine own face. If there be cords, or knives,

Poison, or fire, or suffocating streams,

378. **direct**, straightforward.

379. **for this profit**, for this lesson. Metonymy. **from hence**, henceforward.

380. **sith**, since, because.

381. **Thou shouldst be honest**, you must be a good man, you certainly look one !

382. **I should be wise**, I ought to look after my own interests—and not interfere with yours !

We have seen these two senses of " should " exemplified in 128-130, above.

384. **honest** : see note on 129, above.

387. **As Dian's visage**. Diana was the moon-goddess and also the goddess of chastity.

388-389. **cords...knives...Poison...fire...streams**. Cp. *Pericles*, 4. 2. 160 :

A terrible suspicion has crept into Othello's heart & he robbed his peace of mind

I'll not endure it. Would I were satisfied! 390

Iago. I see, sir you are eaten up with passion;

I do repent me that I put it to you.

You would be satisfied?

Oth. Would! nay, I will.

Iago. And may; but, how? How satisfied, my lord?

Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on— 395

Behold her topp'd?

Oth. Death and damnation! O!

Iago. It were a tedious difficulty, I think,

To bring them to that prospect; damn them then,

If ever mortal eyes do see them bolster

More than their own! What then? How then? 400

What shall I say? Where's satisfaction?

It is impossible you should see this,

Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,

As salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross

As ignorance made drunk. But yet, I say, 405

If imputation and strong circumstances,

If fires be hot, knives sharp, or waters deep.

He means he will employ one or other of these agencies in order to get rid of his faithless wife.

390. **Would**, I wish. **satisfied**, delivered from suspense.

391. **eaten up with passion**. Cp. 165-167, above.

393. **would! nay, I will**. "Would" expresses a mere desire, "will" a fixed determination.

395. **grossly**, stupidly.

397. **a tedious difficulty**, an irksome labour.

403. **prime**, forward, prompt.

406. **imputation and strong circumstances**, "opinion founded on strong circumstantial evidence." Hendiadys.



Which lead directly to the door of truth,

Will give you satisfaction, you might have't.

Oth. Give me a living reason she's disloyal.

Iago. I do not like the office ; *Policy of Iago to go through Desdemona yet very clear* 410

But, sith I am ent'red in this cause so far,

Prick'd to't by foolish honesty and love,

I will go on. I lay with Cassio lately ;

And, being troubled with a raging tooth,

I could not sleep. 415

There are a kind of men so loose of soul,

That in their sleeps will mutter their affairs ;

One of this kind is Cassio. *(O. is supposed to be sound)*

In sleep I heard him say, " Sweet Desdemona,

Let us be wary, let us hide our loves " ; 420

And then, sir, would he gripe and wring my hand,

Cry, " O sweet creature ! " and then kiss me hard,

As if he pluck'd up kisses by the roots

That grew upon my lips ; then lay his leg

Over my thigh, and sigh ; and kiss ; and then 425

Cry, " Cursed fate that gave thee to the Moor ! "

Oth. O monstrous ! monstrous ! *foreposterous*

409. a living reason, a proof arising from some positive fact.

410. the office, the duty. *it loathful to me & I dislike*

412. prick'd on, goaded, driven to it.

413. lay, slept.

416. so loose of soul, having so little check upon their secret thoughts. 417. (they) will.

420. loves, love-affairs. 421. gripe, grip, grasp.

Iago. Nay, this was but his dream.

Oth. But this denoted a foregone conclusion.

'Tis a shrewd doubt, though it be but a dream.

Iago. And this may help to thicken other proofs 430

That do demonstrate thinly.

Oth. I'll tear her all to pieces.

Iago. Nay, but be wise ; yet we see nothing done.

She may be honest yet. Tell me but this,

Have you not sometimes seen a handkerchief

Spotted with strawberries in your wife's hand ? 435

Oth. I gave her such a one ; 'twas my first gift.

Iago. I know not that ; but such a handkerchief—

I am sure it was your wife's—did I to-day

See Cassio wipe his beard with.

Oth. If it be that,—
provided the handkerchief be a ceremonial there is
overwhelming proof of guilt.

427. **Nay, this was but his dream.** Hugo calls attention to Iago's extreme cunning in bringing forward evidence which Cassio could not possibly contradict,—for what person can be certain of what he said or did not say in his sleep ?

428. **a foregone conclusion,** an antecedent experience (see 2. 1. 269).

429. **shrewd,** sore, “ nasty.” **doubt,** ground for doubt, suspicion.

430. **thicken,** give greater cogency to.

“ ...just as a bundle of twigs is stronger than any single twig of which it is composed.” Hugo.

431. **demonstrate,** prove. Cp. note on 1. 1. 61.

433. **Tell me but this.** This fresh suggestion looks as if it were thrown in at haphazard, yet it turns out to be Iago's trump-card.

435. **Spotted with strawberries,** embroidered with a strawberry-pattern.



Iago. If it be that, or any that was hers, 440

It speaks against her with the other proofs.

Oth. O, that the slave had forty thousand lives!

One is too poor, too weak for my revenge.

Now do I see 'tis true. Look here, Iago ;

All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven. 445

'Tis gone.

Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell !

Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne

To tyrannous hate ! Swell, bosom, with thy 446
fraught,

For 'tis of aspics' tongues !

Iago. Yet be content. 450

Oth. O, blood, blood, blood !

Iago. Patience, I say ; your mind [perhaps] may 447
change.

440. **that or any that**, that one or any other one that was hers.

442. **forty thousand**. This number was used indefinitely to express a multitude.

Cp. " *forty thousand brothers*." *Hamlet*, 5. 1. 291.

445. **fond**, foolish. 446. **the hollow hell**. So the Folio : the Quarto has " thy hollow cell."

443-449. **Love** is addressed as a king, hitherto crowned and enthroned in Othello's breast, but who is now required to abdicate in favour of the tyrant called **Hate**. For **hearted** cp. 1. 3. 373.

449. **fraught**, freight, load. *weio*

450. **aspic**, asp, viper.*

Cp. *Ant. and Cleop.*, 5. 2. 354 : " This is an *aspic's* trail ; and these fig-leaves Have slime upon them such as the *aspic* leaves."

Oth. Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic Sea, ^(wh. does not retreat)
 Whose icy current and compulsive course ^{will run forward}
 Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on 455
 To the Propontic and the Hellespont;
 Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
 Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
 Till that a capable and wide revenge,
 Swallow ^{engulf} them up. Now, by yond marble ^{immutable}
 heaven, ^{is the emblem of} 460
 In the due reverence of a sacred vow [Kneels.]
 I here engage my words.

Iago. Do not rise yet.
 Witness, you ever-burning lights above,
 You elements that clip ^{embrace} us round about, [Kneels.]
 I consider ^{all his faculties}

453-460. Shakespeare might have derived his simile from what he had read in Pliny's Natural History: "And the sea Pontus evermore floweth and runneth out into Propontis, but the sea never retireth back again within Pontus."

The passage sounds in Othello's mouth like a reminiscence of his wars against the Turks.

453. **the Pontic Sea**; now called the Black Sea.

454. **compulsive course**, current flowing rapidly in one direction.

456. **the Propontic**, the Sea of Marmora. **the Hellespont**, the Dardanelles. 458. **ebb**, decline.

459. **capable**, sweeping, comprehensive.

460. **marble**, resplendent, shining. Greek, *marmairo*, sparkle.

464. **You elements...about**. This description refers to the celestial spheres of the ancient astronomy, and all the heavenly bodies that were supposed to move in them.



Witness that here Iago doth give up 465

The execution of his wit, hands, heart,

To wrong'd Othello's service ! Let him command,

And to obey shall be in me remorse,

What bloody business ever. *(however, deadly, ghastly.)* [They rise.]

Oth.

I greet thy love,

Not with vain thanks, but with acceptance

bounteous, *I will give you chance of fidelity*

470

And will upon the instant put thee to't :

Within these three days let me hear thee say

That Cassio's not alive.

Iago. My friend is dead ; 'tis done at your request.

Iago thus appeals (one might say) to the whole universe in witness of the solemnity of his oath of allegiance to Othello.

466. **execution**, exercise, ministration.

468. **shall be in me remorse**, "shall be in me an act of pity and compassion for wronged Othello" (Johnson).

In earlier English "remorse" meant "mercy," "tenderness of heart," unattended with the torments of a guilty conscience which we now associate with the word.

[Theobald read "Nor to obey" and Pope "Not to obey" — both editors thus altering Shakespeare's text because they were ignorant of the Elizabethan meaning of "remorse," which they here supposed to mean "cause for repentance."]

469. **what bloody business ever**, however bloody the business I am called upon to execute.

471. **put thee to't**, put thee to the proof. *Cp. 2. 1. 119.

474. **My friend is dead**, *i.e.* it is a settled matter that he shall die. See 224, above.

"One of our poet's vigorous licences of anticipative construction."

But let her live. *Iago gloating & revelling seeing*

Oth. Damn her, lewd minx ! O, damn her ! damn her !

475

Come, go with me apart ; I will withdraw

To furnish me with some swift means of death

For the fair devil. Now art thou my lieutenant. *she has a devil's heart & an angel's face*

Iago. I am your own for ever. *Total triumph* *Exeunt.*

& the compact is ratified & sealed for ever

Scene IV

[*Before the castle.*]

Enter Desdemona, Emilia, and Clown. *in a program*

Des. Do you know, sirrah, where Lieutenant Cassio lies ? *near the*

474. **But let her live.** Iago pretends to intercede for Desdemona ; partly to exasperate Othello, and partly that he might be able to plead afterwards, were he accused of plotting her death, that he tried his best to save her.

478. **Now art thou my Lieutenant.** At the close of this scene Iago's triumph is nearly complete. He has poisoned Othello's mind against Cassio and Desdemona, and obtained the post he had coveted at the opening of the play. But his plot is of the flimsiest nature and his safety depends on Othello taking immediate steps to put his bloody purposes into practice.

Iago and Othello when they leave the scene proceed in different directions. Iago goes to Cassio's lodging and there drops the handkerchief in accordance with his intention intimated in 321 ; while Othello seeks the interior of the castle to find Desdemona and learn from her own lips whether she has parted with his gift or not.

1-31. We find Desdemona still bent on getting Cassio reinstated in his lieutenancy. Her former description of herself was no empty vaunt—

• For when I vow a friendship, I'll perform't
To the last article.



Clo. I dare not say he lies anywhere.

Des. Why, man ?

Clo. He's a soldier, and for ^{to} me to say a soldier lies, 5
'tis stabbing.

Des. Go to ! Where lodges he ?

Clo. To tell you where he lodges, is to tell you ^{where} ~~where~~ I lie.

Des. Can anything be made of this ? 10

Clo. I know not where he lodges, and for me to ^{imagine} devise a lodging and say he lies here or he lies there, were to lie in mine own throat.

Des. Can you inquire him out, and be edified by report ? 15

Clo. I will catechize the world for him ; that is, ^{instruct} make questions, and by them answer. ^{the world I will inquire out where he lies}

Acting in the spirit of these words, she sends her clown to Cassio's lodging to tell him that she has moved her lord on his behalf and hopes all will be well, and also to invite the unhappy men to come at once to the castle.

She is distressed about the missing handkerchief, not, however, because its loss might put her husband to ill thinking, but merely because of the value she attaches to it as his first gift.

2. lies, lodges.

5-6. to say a soldier lies, to charge a soldier with falsehood. 'tis stabbing, is to run the risk of being stabbed.

8. is to tell you where I lie—because I should have to invent an answer out of my head.

13. were to lie in my throat, would be to tell a deliberate lie.

14. be edified, be enlightened, be instructed.

17. by them answer, by the answers to my questions be enabled to give you the information you require.



Des. Seek him, bid him come hither, tell him
I have moved my lord on his behalf, and hope
all will be well. *Emilia, I have lost.* 20

Clo. To do this is within the compass of man's
wit ; and therefore I will attempt the
doing of it. *Exit.*

Des. Where should I lose the handkerchief, Emilia?

Emil. I know not, madam.

Des. Believe me, I had rather have lost my purse 25
Full of cruzadoes ; and, but my noble Moor

In plain English, the clown will find out and let her know.

19. **have moved my lord**, have appealed or applied to
him. Cp. 166, below.

21. **the compass**, the range, the limits.

23. "Where could I have lost the handkerchief?"

The Folio "the" is more significant than the Quarto "that" of
most editions. "to Desdemona this handkerchief was at any time
THE handkerchief and now more than ever" (Walker).

24. **I know not, madam.** Iago foresaw this situation,
and provided for it (3. 3. 319). Emilia is tongue-tied.

The seriousness of Emilia's dilemma is entirely overlooked by Mrs.
Cowden Clarke when she says : "Here the slip-knot-principled woman
tells a point-blank falsehood. Although she knows that her lady
will be deeply distressed at its loss, yet she has not the courage
to own that she has taken the handkerchief, lest her husband should
chide [!] her for violating his injunction."—When she *does* tell the
truth (too late, alas !) her husband *stabs her to death* (5. 2. 225 ff).—
For a more favourable estimate of Emilia, see quotation from Canning
in the note on 5. 2. 251. *She did not mean to injure O. but*

cruzadoes, *i.e.*, golden pieces. **but** (that). *If it were not*

The cruzado—a Portuguese coin=nine shillings—was current in
England in Shakespeare's time. It bore the figure of a cross—hence
its name. Portuguese *cruz*=cross.

Is true of mind and made of no such baseness ^{Distance of}
 As jealous creatures are, it were enough ^{classical irony}
 To put him to ill thinking. ^{no doubt}

Emil. Is he not jealous? ^{suggestive}

Des. Who, he? I think the sun where he was born ³⁰

Drew all such humours from him. ^{The place where he was born the sun sucked up all vapours of}

Emil. Look, where he comes. ^{nature him}

^{last straw wh. broke the cable}

Enter Othello. ^{terrible state of torture, agony}

Des. I will not leave him now till Cassio ^{is the wrong word}

Be call'd to him.—How is't with you, my lord? ^{the wrong}

^{vehemence & urgency, enthusiasm is the sign of youth}

31. **humours**, caprices, fancies.

This word comes from Latin *humorem* = moisture, with reference to the animal fluids which were supposed to determine a person's mentality. Contrast *Desdemona* with *Disdemona* in Cynthio's tale, who speaks thus to her husband: "Nay, but you Moors are of so hot a nature that every little trifle moves you to anger and revenge."

Look where he comes. Cp. 3. 3. 29. ^{Cholera Black Bile Phlegm}

32-96. Othello comes to interrogate Desdemona about the handkerchief, and the interview might be described as "their first quarrel." It has not dawned upon this innocent lady that her husband is the victim of jealousy (she supposes his ill humour is due to some other cause), and she chooses just the most unfortunate moment to renew her suit on Cassio's behalf. Othello takes no notice of her request and peremptorily demands the spotted handkerchief on the plea that he has a cold in the head. When this cannot be produced, he tells her the history of it, and the terrible consequences that might ensue upon the loss of it for it was not merely a *love-token* but also a *love-gage*,—a talisman possessing magical virtue,—and to lose it or give it away were such perdition as nothing else could match. Desdemona, however, only partially realizes "the wonder of the handkerchief," and is at loss to understand her husband's vehemency about its non-appearance till it occurs to her that it may be some trick of his to put her from her suit.



Oth. Well, my good lady. [*Aside.*] Oh, hardness to dis-
semble!—*(How hard it is for me to conceal my real affection. I feel the same old feeling)*
How do you, Desdemona?

Des. Well, my good lord. 35

Oth. Give me your hand. This hand is moist, my lady.

Des. It yet has felt no age, nor known no sorrow.

Oth. This argues fruitfulness and liberal heart;
Hot, hot, and moist. This hand of yours requires
A sequester from liberty, fasting and prayer, 40
Much castigation, exercise devout;

* For here's a young and sweating devil here,
That commonly rebels. 'Tis a good hand,
A frank one.

Des. You may, indeed, say so;

For 'twas that hand that gave away my heart. 45

Oth. A liberal hand. The hearts of old gave hands;

[But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts.]
(Formerly hearts were pledged but nowadays only hands are pledged not heart & in sincere.)

So she harps once more on the string now most discordant to his mind
till Othello leaves the scene in a fit of uncontrollable rage.

34. **Oh, hardness to dissemble.** He always finds it difficult to suppress his old, fond feeling for her.

36. **Give me your hand.** He proceeds to examine her hand like one skilled in palmistry.

38. **This argues fruitfulness,** this moisture betokens bountifulness, liberality (cp. "fruitful," 2. 3. 347).

41. **exercise devout,** the practice of religious duties.

"Family exercise, as Andrew called evening devotion." *Rob Roy*, chap. xviii. "Descend into yourself, try your own mind with sufficiency of soul exercise." *H. of Midlothian*, chap. xviii.

47. **hands not hearts.** This alludes to the old form of troth-plight: cp. *Tempest*, 3. 1. 88:

(...but the symbol of the)



Des. I cannot speak of this. Come now, your promise.

Oth. What promise, chuck?

Des. I have sent to bid Cassio come speak with you. 50

Oth. I have a salt and sorry rheum offends me ;

Lend me thy handkerchief.

Des. Here, my lord.

Oth. That which I gave you. *Love token*

Des. I have it not about me.

Oth. Not? *I think you wd carry it like a mascot*

Des. No, indeed, my lord.

Oth. That's a fault. That handkerchief 55

Did an Egyptian to my mother give ;

Ferdinand. Here's my hand.

Miranda. And mine, with all my heart in's.

It has been suggested that there is an allusion here to the new order of baronets which came into existence in 1611, the heraldic badge of which was a bloody hand. If this be the case, the passage must be an interpolation, for the play was in existence fully six years before the date in question.

49. **chuck**, chick, chicken.

This is a term of endearment, but less affectionate than "honey" (2. 1. 206) or "sweeting" (2. 3. 252).

51. **a salt and sorry rheum**, a troublesome cold in the head, **offends me**, (that) distresses me.

53. **I have it not about me**. Desdemona would doubtless have imparted her grief to her husband in a softer hour, but his present mood does not invite her confidence.

"It takes two to speak truth—one to speak and another to hear."

56. **an Egyptian**, a woman of Egypt ; perhaps a gipsy.

Our word "gipsy" is a corruption of "Egyptian" (as this race was designated in the statutes passed against them). This nomadic people have for centuries wandered over Western Europe, making their

She was a charmer, and could almost read
The thoughts of people. She told her, while she
kept it

'Twould make her amiable, and subdue my father
Entirely to her love, but if she lost it, 60

Or made a gift of it, my father's eye
Should hold her loathed and his spirits should hunt
After new fancies. She, dying, gave it me ;

And bid me, when my fate would have me wive,
To give it her. I did so ; and take heed on't ; 65

Make it a darling like your precious eye.
To lose't or give't away were such perdition
As nothing else could match.

Des. Is't possible ?

Oth. 'Tis true ; there's magic in the web of it.
A sibyl, that had numb'ed in the world 70

living by fortune-telling, etc. Their language is a much-corrupted Hindi, showing that their original home was Hindustan.

57. **a charmer**, an enchantress, one who deals in charms and spells.

This word occurs once in Shakespeare and once in the Bible :
"Let none be found among you that is a *charmer*." Deut. 18. 11.

59. **amiable**, worthy to be loved, loveable.

62. **his spirit**, his mind, his affections.

65. **To give it her**, *i.e.*, to give it to *my wife* (implied in "**wive**.")

66. **a darling...eye**, dear to you as the apple of your eye.

70. **A sibyl**, a prophetess, a sorceress. **that had numb'ed...compasses**, that had lived to see the sun completing 200 revolutions, *i.e.*, that was 200 years old.



The sun to course two hundred compasses,
 In her prophetic fury sew'd the work;
 The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk;
 And it was dyed in mummy, which the skilful
 Conserv'd of maidens' hearts.

Des. Indeed ! is't true ?

Oth. Most veritable ; therefore look to't well. 75

Des. Then would to God that I had never seen't !

Oth. Ha ! wherefore ?

Des. Why do you speak so startingly and rash ?

Oth. Is't lost ? Is't gone ? Speak, is it out o' the
 way ? 80

Des. Heaven bless us !

Oth. Say you ?

The simple idea is clothed in the "heightened" language peculiar to poetry. The whole passage about the handkerchief is a capital instance of "the grand style."

The extreme longevity of the sibyls is elsewhere alluded to in Shakespeare. "As old as Sibyl" (*Taming of the Shrew*, 1. 2. 70) ; "If I live to be as old as Sibylla" (*Merch. of Venice*, 1. 2. 116).

72. **sew'd**, i.e., wove. 73. **hallow'd**, consecrated.

74. **mummy** : a balsamic liquor that oozed from embalmed bodies.

It was of a transparent brown colour, and was held in esteem both by physicians and painters. "Mummy is become merchandise ; Mizraim (Egypt) cures wounds, and Pharaoh is sold for balsam." Browne, *Urn-burial*.

79. **startingly**, by fits and starts, spasmodically. **rash**, rashly = vehemently, excitedly.

80. **out o' the way**, not forthcoming, not producible.

82. **Say you ?** Is it really lost ?



Des. It is not lost ; but what an if it were ?

Oth. How ?

Des. I say, it is not lost.

Oth. Fetch't, let me see it. 85.

Des. Why, so I can, sir, but I will not now. *poverty of nature.*

This is a trick to put me from my suit.

Pray you, let Cassio be receiv'd again.

Oth. Fetch me the handkerchief ; my mind misgives.

Des. Come, come ; 90.

You'll never meet a more sufficient man. *able man*

Oth. The handkerchief !

[*Des.* I pray, talk me of Cassio. *talk of C. as entreat you*

Oth. The handkerchief !]

Des. A man that all his time

83. **It is not lost.** Desdemona does not suppose that it is irrecoverably lost, but her next words contemplate even such a possibility.

Desdemona is a child of the Italian renaissance and not inclined to attach too much importance to the history of the handkerchief. She may be excused for thinking that her husband is taking a morbid view about the loss of it—that he is really far more serious than the case demands. So when Othello's mind is full of the gravest misgivings about the gipsy's prediction (which to a man of his race and ancestry could be no laughing matter) she harks back to the topic which irritates him most—and the conflict which thus arises springs from differences the most deeply seated in their natures.

89. **misgives**, misgives me, fills my mind with foreboding.

91. **sufficient**, qualified for his post : cp. 4. 1. 276.

92. **talk me of Cassio.** For this ethic dative cp. 1. 1. 49 and 2. 3. 84.

Hath founded his good fortunes on your love, *looks as a*
 Shared dangers with you,— 95

Oth. The handkerchief!

Des. I' faith, you are to blame.

Oth. 'Zounds!

Exit.

Emil. Is not this man jealous?

Des. I ne'er saw this before. 100

Sure, there's some wonder in this handkerchief;
 I am most unhappy in the loss of it. *she becomes introspective*

Emil. 'T is not a year or two shows us a man:

nothing appetite
 They are all but stomachs, and we all but food;

They eat us hungerly, and when they are full 105

They belch us.

Enter Iago and Cassio.

Look you,—Cassio and my husband.

Iago. There is no other way: 't is she must do't:

And lo, the happiness! go and importune her. *beg her, don't he go till she*

Des. How now, good Cassio! what's the news with you? *ground*

Cas. Madam, my former suit: I do beseech you, 110

That by your virtuous means I may again

Cas. restored by suspense & words to the previous (Botched agony) result whatever
 101. some wonder, something uncanny, some mystery. *magic*

104. "They are all of them nothing but stomachs, and
 we are all of us nothing but food."

105. hungerly, ravenously.

Stage-direction. Iago has been to Cassio's lodging, and has there dropped the handkerchief; which Cassio has picked up and put into his pocket. As Iago accompanies Cassio to the castle, he urges him once more to ply Desdemona well and he will soon be restored to his former office.

108. lo, the happiness! see your good luck!

111. virtuous, powerful, influential. *Influence brought to bear upon C*

Exist, and be a member of his love
 Whom I, with all the office of my heart,
 Entirely honour. I would not be delay'd :
 If my offence be of such mortal kind, 115
 That nor my service past, nor present sorrows,
 Nor purpos'd merit in futurity,
 Can ransom me into his love again,
 But to know so must be my benefit ;
 So shall I clothe me in a forc'd content, 120
 And shut myself up in some other course,
 To fortune's alms.

Des. Alas, thrice-gentle Cassio !
 My advocacy is not now in tune ;
 My lord is not my lord ; nor should I know him,
 Were he in favour as in humour alter'd. 125

112. **Exist** : cp. 4. 1. 106. **a member**, a partaker or a sharer of his love.

113. **office**, duty (as the Quarto reads). Latin *officium*, duty.

115. **of such mortal kind**, so deadly in its nature.

117. **purpos'd merit in futurity**, resolve to do well in the future.

118. **But to know so**, *i.e.*, to know the worst.

121-122. **shut...alms**, "confine myself to some other course, awaiting whatever fortune may bestow upon me." (Clarke.)

123. **advocation**, intercession. **not in tune**, not agreeable to his ears : (cp. *Julius Caesar*, 3. 1. 50.)

125. **favour**, looks, appearance, aspect. **humour**, mood.

Desdemona looks upon Othello's ill-humour merely as a temporary aberration of mind.

So help me every spirit sanctified, *may the deities*

As I have spoken for you all my best

And stood within the blank of his displeasure

For my free speech ! You must a while be patient.

What I can do I will ; and more I will, *magnanimity* 130

Than for myself I dare. Let that suffice you. *generous*

Iago. Is my lord angry ? *mask of hypocrisy as if fallen from the*

Emil. *his words have he does not say anything for nothing* He went hence but now,

And certainly in strange *double significance* unquietness. *is self composed*

Iago. Can he be angry ? I have seen the cannon *cannon, unruffled nature, com*

When it hath blown his ranks into the air, 135

And (like the devil) from his very arm

Puff'd his own brother :—and is he angry ?

Something of moment then. I will go meet him ;

There's matter in't indeed, if he be angry.

Exit Iago.

Des. I prithee, do so. Something, sure, of state, 140

she does not

some state affair

126. **So help me...sanctified.** She invokes the saints and angels in the hour of her extremity.

128. **stood within the blank...displeasure,** bore the brunt of his anger.

The word " blank " means " white " ; hence the white spot in the centre of a target (cp. " point-blank "). " As level as the cannon to his blank," *Hamlet*, 4.1.12.

137. **Puff'd his own brother.** Actors usually complete the sense by adding " yet he stood unmov'd."

139. **matter...indeed,** something momentous.

So he hurries away as if he feared that some military emergency had arisen, making it necessary for him to report himself to his general.

140-154. Desdemona makes imaginary excuses for her husband's anger and upbraids herself for having arraigned him of unkindness.

Either from Venice, or some unhatch'd practice
 Made demonstrable here in Cyprus to him,
 Hath puddled his clear spirit ; and in such cases
 Men's natures wrangle with inferior things,
 Though great ones are their object. 'Tis even

so ;

145

For let our finger ache, and it endues
 Our other healthful members even to that sense
 Of pain. Nay, we must think men are not gods,
 Nor of them look for such observancy
 As fits the bridal. Beshrew me much, Emilia,

150

141-142. **some unhatch'd practice** **Made demonstra-**
ble, some conspiracy that has come to light before it has
 reached maturity.

"Unhatch'd"=not yet disclosed from the egg. A conspiracy at
 the initial stage might be compared to the egg of a serpent or a
 cockatrice.

143. **Hath puddled his clear spirit.** His mind is
 implicitly likened to a fountain of clear water.

144. **inferior things**—such as herself, she means !

146. **endues** (Quarto and Folio), induces, subdues.

147. **even to that sense of pain.** "Even" has here the
 unusual sense of "equally," "likewise," "as well."

For this idea cp. "If one member [of the body] suffer, all the
 members suffer with it." 1 Corinthians, 12.26.

149. **observancy**, dutiful attention. Cp. the note
 on 1. 3. 238.

150. **the bridal**, the nuptial festival.

Another suggestion of long time.—"It is put into the mouth of a
 woman the morning after the celebration of her nuptials, but it
 gives the effect of being spoken by a woman long past the season of
 her honeymoon." Clarke.



injust estimate
 I was (unhandsome warrior as I am),
 Arraigning his unkindness with my soul; *accusing him*
 But now I find I had suborn'd the witness, *I have brought*
 And he's indicted falsely. *false charge*

Emil. Pray Heaven it be state-matters, as you think, 155
 And no conception nor no jealous toy *nothing regarding*
 Concerning you. *whimsical act of jealousy*

Des. Alas the day! I never gave him cause.

Emil. But jealous souls will not be answered so;
 They are not ever jealous for the cause, *it is the fault & part of the*
 But jealous for they are jealous: it is a monster *160 of their*
 Begot upon itself, born on itself. *in keeping of the temperance knowing the rest*
proves that it does not require a cause

Des. Heaven keep the monster from Othello's mind!

Emil. Lady, amen.

Des. I will go seek him. Cassio, walk here about; 165
 If I do find him fit, I'll move your suit,

151. **unhandsome warrior**, ungenerous assailant. Cp.
 2. 1. 184.

153. **suborn'd**, bribed, corrupted.

156. **jealous toy**, passing whim occasioned by jealousy.

Cp. 1. 3. 269.

160. **for the cause**, *i.e.*, because they have good cause
 to be jealous.

161. **for they are jealous**, simply because they are
 jealous.

a monster: cp. "the green-ey'd monster," 3. 3. 166.
 The Quarto in 163 has "that monster."

162. **Begot...on itself**, self-generated, self-nourished.

Emilia can speak feelingly, for the monster in question has
 possession of Iago's mind (4.2.145-147).

166. **fit**, in a compliant mood.



And seek to effect it to my uttermost.

Cas. I humbly thank your ladyship.

Exeunt [Desdemona and Emilia].

Enter Bianca.

Bian. Save you, friend Cassio !

Cas. What make you from home ?

How is it with you, my most fair Bianca ? 170

I' faith, sweet love, I was coming to your house. *to find out if long absent*

Bian. And I was going to your lodging, Cassio.

What, keep a week away ? seven days and nights ?

Eight score eight hours ? and lovers' absent hours,

More tedious than the dial eight score times ? 175

Oh, weary reckoning !

Cas. Pardon me, Bianca :

I have this while with leaden thoughts been press'd ;

How little she has sounded the depths of his passion ! She thinks that it was only a momentary mood, and that in this short time he may have recovered himself.

169-201. This is the first of Bianca's three appearances in the play. Cassio gives her the handkerchief to copy, thus preparing us for the episode in the next Act.

168. **Save you,** *God save you.*

169. **What make you,** what are you doing ?

170. **most fair Bianca,** Perhaps with a quibble on the meaning of the name = "fair." Cp. note on l. 1. 21.

174. **lovers' absent hours.** "'Tis common to every lover, 'tis all his felicity to be with *her*. And when he is gone, he thinks every minute an hour, every hour as long as a day, ten days a whole year, till he see her again." Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part 3, Sec. 2.

177. **with leaden thoughts been press'd,** been weighed down with depressing thoughts. *heavy*

But I shall, in a more continue time,
Strike off this score of absence. Sweet Bianca,

[Giving her Desdemona's handkerchief.]

Take me this work out.

Bian. Oh, Cassio, whence came this ?

This is some token from a newer friend ; 181

To the felt absence now I feel a cause.

Is't come to this ? Well, well.

Cas. Go to, woman !

Throw your vile guesses in the devil's teeth,
From whence you have them. You are jealous

now 185

That this is from some mistress, some remembrance :

178. in a more continue time, when I am less liable
to interruption.

179. strike off this score of absence, pay off the debt
I owe you because of my absence.

The " score " was originally the reckoning scored up on the tavern-
post : cp. *Comedy of Errors*, 1.2.64-65.

180. Take me this work out, copy this pattern for me.

Oh, Cassio. The interjection expresses several emo-
tions,—distrust, remonstrance, and (not least) womanly
curiosity about the handkerchief.

Here (and in other instances where this exclamation is detached from
what follows) we have followed Quarto and Folio in printing " Oh " in
preference to the unvarying " O " of our modernised editions. In the
old texts they are clearly discriminated, often to the reader's advantage,
' Oh ' being a longer and stronger sound than ' O,' and expressing a
far wider range of emotions.

181. friend, sweetheart. French *amie*.

185. jealous, apprehensive, suspicious.

No, by my faith, Bianca.

Bian.

Why, whose is it?

Cas. I know not, sweet; I found it in my chamber.

I like the work well; ere it be demanded
(As like enough it will) I would have it copied. 190
Take it, and do't; and leave me for this time.

Bian. Leave you! Wherefore?

Cas. I do attend here on the general; And think it no addition, nor my wish, 194
To have him see me woman'd.

Bian.

Why, I pray you?

Cas. Not that I love you not.

Bian.

But that you do not love me.

I pray you, bring me on the way a little,
And say, if I shall see you soon at night.

Cas. 'Tis but a little way that I can bring you,
For I attend here; but I'll see you soon. 200

Bian. 'Tis very good; I must be circumstanc'd.

Exeunt.

194. **no addition**, no honour, no credit.

195. **woman'd**, accompanied by a woman.

198. **soon at night**, towards evening. Cp. *Comedy of Errors*, 1. 2. 26 ("soon at five o'clock").

201. **be circumstanc'd**, yield to circumstances; i.e., put up with this snub.

Act Fourth.

Scene I.

[*Cyprus. Before the castle.*]

Enter Othello and Iago.

Iago. Will you think so ?

Oth. Think so, Iago !

Iago. What,

The setting of this scene is finely shown in a full-page wood engraving by F. Wentworth in the Cowden Clarke Shakespeare. Here the Moor is seen in his flowing robes going round the fortifications, while the ancient, in the dress of a cavalier, closely dogs his footsteps insinuating his poison into his victim's too-credulous ear. Othello's right hand covers his brow and eyes ; and his left, a little extended, is strongly clenched. But the most striking thing in the picture is the delineation of Iago—the ferret-like eyes, with their pupils narrowed to fiercely gleaming points—and an expression of triumphant devilry pervading his whole figure.

1.—146. "The first part of the scene," writes Dr. Bradley, "is hard to understand, and the commentators give little help. I take the idea to be as follows.—Iago sees that he must renew his attack on Othello ; who now seems to have fallen into a dazed lethargic state, and must be stimulated to action. Iago's plan seem to be to remind Othello of everything that would madden him again, but to do so by professing to make light of the whole affair, and by urging Othello to put the best construction on the facts, or at anyrate to acquiesce. So he says, in effect : 'After all, if she did kiss Cassio, that might mean little. Nay, she might even go much further without meaning any harm. [The reader who is puzzled by this passage should refer to the conversation at the end of the 30th tale in the *Heptameron*]. Of course there is the handkerchief'(10) ; but then



To kiss in private ?

Oth. An unauthoriz'd kiss.

Iago. Or to be naked with her friend in bed
An hour or more, not meaning any harm ?

Oth. Naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm !

5

It is hypocrisy against the devil.

They that mean virtuously, and yet do so,
The devil their virtue tempts, and they tempt heaven.

Iago. So they do nothing, 'tis a venial slip,

Oth. But if I give my wife a handkerchief,—

10

Oth. What then ?

why should she not give it away ?' Then, affecting to renounce this hopeless attempt to disguise his true opinion, he goes on : ' However, I cannot, as your friend, pretend that I really regard her as innocent : the fact is, Cassio boasted to me in so many words of his conquest. [Here he is interrupted by Othello's swoon]. But, after all, why make such a fuss ? You share the fate of most married men, and you have the advantage of not being deceived in the matter.' "

1. **Will you think so ?** Iago's question implies, " You are too severe a moralist" (2.3.301).

As they walk up the stage they are continuing a conversation already begun. This gives an effect of naturalness and ease to the ensuing dialogue (cp. 1. 1. 1.).

2. **To kiss in private ?** " Do you mean to condemn kissing in private ?"—**An unauthorized kiss.** Iago's point is that such a kiss involves no breach of decorum ; Othello's that it is a breach of the marriage vow.

6. **hypocrisy against the devil ;** because they make the devil think them more wicked than they really are.

" As common hypocrites cheat men by seeming good and yet living wickedly, these men would cheat the devil by giving him flattering hopes and at last avoiding the crimes which he thinks they are ready to commit. " Johnson.

Iago. Why, then 'tis hers, my lord ; and, being hers,
She may, I think, bestow't on any man.

Oth. She is protectress of her honour too ;

May she give that ?

Iago. Her honour is an essence that's not seen ;

They have it very oft that have it not :

But, for the handkerchief,—

Oth. By heaven, I would most gladly have forgot it.

Thou said'st (oh, it comes o'er my memory,

As doth the raven o'er the infected house,

Boding to all) he had my handkerchief.

Iago. Ay, what of that ?

16. **an essence**, something that is, an entity. Latin, *essentia*, from *esse*, to exist.

17. **They have it...have it not**, i.e., they have it nominally if not actually.

The speaker himself is the best exemplification of his own words ; as formerly in 2.3.268 where he said that reputation was "an idle and false imposition ; oft got without merit, and lost without deserving."

19. **I would...have forgot it.**—But Iago is at his side to compel him to *remember* about it.

"On matters like these Othello cannot think ; and when he tries to think, he thinks wrong." Raleigh, *Shakespeare*, p. 141.

20. **comes o'er my memory.** This is the "shadowing passion" of 41, below, already stealing over him.

21. The **raven** was believed to carry infection wherever it went.

Cp. *Much Ado*, 2.3.83 : "I had as lief have heard the night-raven, come what plague could have come after me."

22. **Boding to all**, threatening mischief to all the inmates.

Oth.

That's not so good now.

Iago.

What

If I had said I had seen him do you wrong ?

Or heard him say (as knaves be such abroad, 25

Who having, by their own importunate suit, *persistent pleading*Or voluntary dotage of some mistress, *who have won over the mistress*Convinced or suppli'd them, cannot choose *by persistent**or that I was in love pleading*

23. **That's not so good now.** That is a rather suspicious circumstance !

25. **as knaves be such abroad,** and there are such knaves in the world !

26-28. The prose order would be : **convinced** (=overcome) **by their own importunate suit,** or **supplied them by voluntary dotage** (=excessive fondness) **of some mistress.** The distributive construction.

" Iago is here describing two sorts of gallants ; (1) one who by their importunities have convinced, or overcome, their mistresses ; (2) the other, who, when their mistresses voluntarily doated on them, have supplied them with the effects of love." Jennings.

28-29. **cannot choose...blab,** cannot help boasting about their gallantries.

Cp. Cinthio's *Hecatombithi* : " Nay, this same captain told it me himself, like one whose happiness is incomplete until he hath declared it to another."

34-44. Othello is nearly demented by the hideous images which Iago's evil mind—by a process which makes us think of suggestion or thought-transference—conjures up in his own pure mind.

Sir Joshua Reynolds has a long note from which we quote the following.

" Othello alludes only to Cassio's dream, which had been invented and told him by Iago. When many confused ideas pour in upon the

But they must blab)—

Oth. Hath he said anything ?

Iago. He hath, my lord ; but be you well assur'd, 30
No more than he'll un-swear. *Iago*

Oth. What hath he said ?

Iago. Faith, that he did—I know not what he did.

Oth. What ? what ?

Iago. Lie—

Oth. With her ?

Iago. With her, on her ; what you will.

Oth. Lie with her ! lie on her ! We say lie on 35
her, when they be-lie her. Lie with her !
'Zounds, that's fulsome !—Handkerchief—
confessions—handkerchief !—To confess, and
be hanged for his labour ;—first, to be

mind all at once, and with such rapidity that it has not time to shape or digest them, it produces stupefaction and fainting. Othello, in broken sentences and single words, all of which have a reference to the cause of his jealousy, shows that all the proofs are present at once to his mind, which so overpowers it, that he falls into a trance, the natural consequence."

"To me," writes Christopher North, "it has no other effect or sense, than that of the blood being driven up into the head, and oppressing with physical pressure that bodily organ—the brain. The soul strikes the body like a hammer, and knocks it down."

32. **I know not what he did.** "*Iago* does not accuse Desdemona, but merely suggests her guilt, leaving it to *Othello* to draw up the indictment." Gerard.

36. **be-lie**, calumniate.

37. **fulsome**, morally foul, filthy.

38. **To confess and be hanged.** A proverbial saying, which Othello in his confusion proceeds to reverse.

hanged, and then to confess.—I tremble at
 it. Nature would not invest herself in such 40
 shadowing passion without some instruc-
 tion. It is not words that shake me thus. *more words do not make me tremble.*
 Pish! Noses, ears, and lips.—Is't possible?
 —Confess—handkerchief!—O devil!

Falls in a trance.

Iago. Work on, 45

My medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are
 caught;

And many worthy and chaste dames even thus,
 All guiltless, meet reproach.—What, ho! my
 lord!

My lord, I say! Othello!

Enter Cassio.

How now, Cassio!

Cas. What's the matter? 50

41. **shadowing passion**, passion overshadowing the
 senses with gloom. **without some instruction**, without
 intending to convey some supernatural warning to the
 mind.

Johnson explains the passage thus: "This passion, which spreads
 its clouds over me, is the effect of some agency more than the opera-
 tion of words; it is one of those notices which men have of unseen
 calamities."

46. **medicine**, poison.

In *King Lear*, 5.3.96 this word is applied to the poison administered
 by Goneril to Regan:

Regan. Sick, O, sick!

Goneril. [*Aside.*] If not, I'll ne'er trust *medicine*.

46. **are caught**. Cp. 2.3.368.

47. **All guiltless**, altogether or wholly guiltless.



Iago. My lord is fallen into an epilepsy.
This is his second fit ; he had one yesterday.

Cas. Rub him about the temples.

Iago. [No, forbear ;]

The lethargy must have his quiet course ;
If not, he foams at mouth and by and by 55
Breaks out to savage madness. Look, he stirs.
Do you withdraw yourself a little while,
He will recover straight. When he is gone,
I would on great occasion speak with you. *moment*

Exit Cassio.

How is it, general ? Have you not hurt your
head ? 60

Oth. Dost thou mock me ? *jeering*

Iago. I mock you not, by heaven.

51. **epilepsy** : called also "the falling sickness" from the suddenness of its attacks.

Whether Othello was really subject to these attacks we can hardly tell from the testimony of such a consistent liar as Iago.—Among other illustrious names associated with the falling sickness are Julius Caesar, Mohammed, Peter the Great, and Napoleon.

54. **lethargy**, state of torpor. Greek, *lethargia*, from *lethe*, forgetfulness. **his**, its.

58. **straight**, straightway, immediately.

59. **on great occasion**, upon important business.

61. **I mock you not, by heaven**, Iago mocked him when he put the question to him and he mocks him even more when he "plays the innocent" and denies that he meant anything.

Hart (whether rightly or wrongly we cannot say) explains Othello's indignation by quoting from Nashe's *Wonderful Prognostication* (1591) : "Many that have fair wives shall be troubled with great swelling in the brows, a disease as incurable as the gout."



Would you would bear your fortune like a man !

Oth. A horned man's a monster and a beast.

Iago. There's many a beast then in a populous city,
And many a civil monster. 65

Oth. Did he confess it ?

Iago. Good sir, be a man ;

Think every bearded fellow that's but yok'd
May draw with you. There's millions now alive
That nightly lie in those unproper beds *not ones own*
Which they dare swear peculiar ; your case is *be another*
better. 70

O, 'tis the spite of hell, the fiend's arch-mock,

62. Cp. note on 3.3.374. ("Are you a man?")

65. **civil monster.** Oxymoron and paronomasia : "civil"
(1)=civilized and (2)=living in a city.

67. **bearded fellow** : a periphrasis for "man." **that's but yok'd** : provided he has a wife.

Marriage is likened to a yoke : so "yokefellow" or "yokemate" = partner in marriage.

68. **May draw with you**, is in like case with yourself —this keeps up the figure.

69. **unproper**, not exclusively their own. Latin *proprius*, one's own.

70. **peculiar**, private, all their own.

In Shakespeare's time "unproper" (or "improper") had not yet acquired its meaning of "indecent," "unbecoming" ; nor "peculiar" its meaning of "singular," "remarkable."

71. **the spite of hell**, the devil's way of deriding mortals. This is further expanded in **the fiend's arch-mock**.

To lip a wanton in a ^{lewd} secure couch,
And to suppose her chaste ! No, let me know ;
And knowing what I am, I know what she ^{let me know how she}
shall be. ^{has dealt with me}

Oth. Oh, thou art wise ; 'tis certain.

Iago. Stand you a while apart ; ^{I will deal with her according}

Confine yourself but in a patient list. ^{exercise patience} 75

Whilst you were here, o'erwhelmed with your
grief

(A passion most unsuited such a man)

72. **To lip**, the kiss. **secure**, untroubled with suspicion.
Transferred epithet.

76. **in a patient list**, within the bounds of patience.

The " lists " were the barriers enclosing a tilt-yard.

77-225. Iago informs Othello that at the time of his swoon, Cassio came to interview him and that he will come again presently. He persuades Othello to conceal himself and listen to the discourse he is about to hold with Cassio,—for he will ask Cassio to tell the tale anew of his conquest of Desdemona. When Cassio appears Iago questions him about *Bianca*, in a way that makes Cassio laugh aloud. Othello sees in this the confirmation of Iago's story and can scarcely contain his fury. At this point Bianca herself comes upon the scene and in a fit of jealousy returns the handkerchief to Cassio saying it must be some minx's token, and that he can give it to his newer friend to copy, for she will take out no such work for him. When Bianca and Cassio withdraw, Othello and Iago together devise means for putting Desdemona and Cassio to death that night.

" When the conversation breaks off here (225) Iago has brought Othello back to the position reached at the end of the Temptation scene (3.3). Cassio and Desdemona are to be killed ; and, in addition, the time is hastened ; it is to be ' to-night,' not ' within three days.' " Bradley.

77. **o'erwhelmed**. See Appendix.

Cassio came hither. I shifted him away,
 And laid good 'scuse upon your ecstasy ; 80
 Bade him anon return and here speak with me,
 The which he promis'd. Do but encave yourself,
 And mark the fleers, the gibes, and notable scorns,
 That dwell in every region of his face ;
 For I well make him tell the tale anew, 85
 Where, how, how oft, how long ago, and when
 He hath, and is again to cope your wife.
 I say, but mark his ^{expression} gesture. Marry, patience ;
 Or I shall say you're all in all in spleen,
 And nothing of a man. 90

you nearly want to make + these is no vengeance - mantiveness

80. **ecstasy**, swoon.

The word means literally "the throwing of the mind out of its normal place." Greek *ekstasis*, from *existanai*, to put out of place, derange.

82. **encave yourself**, conceal yourself as in a cave.

The Othello of the Shakespearian stage would take up his position between the two halves of the traverse curtain.

83. **fleers**. The Quarto has "jeers," meaning the same thing. **scorns**, scornful gestures.

84. **every region** : comparing Cassio's face to a map.

87. **cope**, have dealing with.

89. **but**, only.

89-90. **all in all in spleen...nothing of a man**. "The spleen was reckoned the seat of tempestuous passion" (Sir Sidney Lee).

Othello is again in the "melting mood" (5.2.349) and again exposes himself to Iago's taunts (see note on 3.3.374). The old physiology connected the spleen with weeping ; cp. Donne's couplet :

Kind pity checks my spleen ; brave scorn forbids
 Those tears to issue, which swell my eye lids.

Oth. Dost thou hear, Iago? • • •

I will be found most cunning in my patience;
But (dost thou hear?) most bloody.

Iago. That's not amiss;

But yet keep time in all. Will you withdraw?

[*Othello conceals himself.*]

Now will I question Cassio of Bianca;

A housewife that by selling her desires

95

Buys herself bread and clothes. It is a creature

That dotes on Cassio;—as 'tis the strumpet's plague

To beguile many and be beguil'd by one;—

He, when he hears of her, cannot refrain

From the excess of laughter. Here he comes: 100

Re-enter Cassio [at a distance.]

As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad;

And his unbookish jealousy must construe

Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures, and light behaviours

Quite in the wrong. How do you now, lieutenant?

Cas. The worser, that you give me the addition 105

Whose want even kills me.

Iago. Ply Desdemona well, and you are sure on't.

[*Speaking lower.*] Now, if this suit lay in Bianca's
power,

95. **housewife**, hussy, light woman.

102. **unbookish**, ignorant, *not in the secret*.

104. **How do you now, lieutenant?** Observe the
adroitness with which Iago leads up the conversation to the
subject of Bianca. 105. **the addition**, the title of lieutenant.

108. **power** is the Quarto, and "dower" the Folio reading.
The discrepancy appears once more to be due to an inverted letter.



How quickly should you speed!

Cas. Alas, poor caitiff!

Oth. Look, how he laughs already! 110

Iago. I never knew a woman love man so.

Cas. Alas, poor rogue! I think, i' faith, she loves me.

Oth. Now he denies it faintly, and laughs it out.

Iago. Do you hear, Cassio? [*Whispering in his ear.*] 115

Oth. Now he importunes him

To tell it o'er. Go to; well said, well said.

Iago. She gives it out that you shall marry her.

Do you intend it?

Cas. Ha, ha, ha! 120

Oth. Do you triumph, Roman? Do you triumph?

Cas. I marry her! What? a customer! Prithee, bear some charity to my wit; do not think it so unwholesome. Ha, ha, ha! 125

109. **speed**, prosper. **caitiff**, wretch (literally "captive").

111. **so**, as she loves you.

112. **rogue** is a term of endearment.

Cp. "You sweet little *rogue*," 2 *Henry IV.* 2. 4. 233.

112. **I think**. The uncertainty is ironical (cp. *C. of Errors*, 5. 1. 23), as is plain from the unrestrained laughter which accompanies the words.

117. **well said, well said**. Cp. note on 2. 1. 168.

121. The word **Roman** is possibly suggested by the preceding **Do you triumph**.

123. **a customer**. A cant term for a prostitute.



Oth. So, so, so, so ; they laugh that win.

Iago. Faith, the cry goes that you shall marry her.

Cas. Prithee, say true.

Iago. I am a very villain else.

130

Oth. Have you scored me ? Well.

Cas. This is the monkey's own giving out. She is persuaded I will marry her, out of her own love and flattery, not out of my promise.

Oth. Iago beckons me ; now he begins the story.

135

Cas. She was here even how ; she haunts me in every place. I was the other day talking on the sea-bank with certain Venetians ; and thither comes the bauble, and, [by this hand, she] falls me thus about my neck—

140

Oth. Crying, " O dear Cassio ! " as it were ; his gesture imports it.

Cas. So hangs, and lolls, and weeps upon me ; so shakes and pulls me. Ha, ha, ha !

127. **the cry goes**, the rumour goes round.

131. **Have you scored me ?** Cassio could not marry Desdemona before disposing of her present husband : hence Othello's question = *Have you marked me out for slaughter ?* "

134. **beckons me**, makes a sign to me to mark what is now coming.

139. **the bauble**, the foolish creature.

141. **his gesture imports it**. Cassio falls about Iago's neck and drags him about in imitation of Bianca's behaviour towards himself.

For this peculiar sense of " import " cp. " Belike this show imports the argument of the play." *Hamlet*, 3. 2. 149.

143. **lolls**, leans, reclines upon.

Oth. Now he tells how she pluck'd him to my 145
chamber. O, I see that nose of yours, but
not that dog I shall throw it to.

Cas. Well, I must leave her company.

Iago. Before me! look, where s'he comes.

Enter Bianca.

Cas. 'Tis such another fitchew! Marry, a per- 150
fum'd one.—What do you mean by this
haunting of me?

Bian. Let the devil and his dam haunt you!
What did you mean by that same handker-
chief you gave me even now? I was a fine fool 155
to take it. I must take out the work?—
A likely piece of work, that you should find it
in your chamber, and know not who left it
there! This is some minx's token, and I must

145. **I see that nose** etc. The concentration of fury and execration packed into these words is scarcely to be matched even in Shakespeare.

Hart reminds us that cutting off the nose was a regular judicial punishment in those days.

149. **Before me!** On my soul! A common interjectional phrase.

150. **such another**=a very, a regular. **fitchew**, polecat, a creature with an objectionable smell.

155. **even now.** These words serve to link the present scene with the last, where Cassio gives her the handkerchief. **I was a fine fool**, it was very simple-minded of me.

159, 161. **minx...hobby-horse.** Both these terms are descriptive of a frivolous, dissolute woman.



take out the work? There; give it your 160
hobby-horse. Wheresoever you had it, I'll
take out no work on't.

Cas. How now, my sweet Bianca! how now! how now!

Oth. By heaven, that should be my handkerchief! 165

Bian. If you'll come to supper to-night, you
may; if you will not, come when you are next
prepared for. *next asked... never* *Exit.*

Iago. After her, after her.

Cas. Faith, I must; she'll rail in the streets else. 170

Iago. Will you sup there?

Cas. Yes, I intend so.

Iago. Well, I may chance to see you; for I
would very fain speak with you. 175

Cas. Prithee, come; will you?

Iago. Go to; say no more. *Exit Cassio.*

Oth. [Advancing.] How shall I murder him, Iago?

Iago. Did you perceive how he laugh'd at his vice? 180

Oth. Oh, Iago!

Iago. And did you see the handkerchief?

Oth. Was that mine?

Iago. Yours, by this hand. And to see how he
prizes the foolish woman your wife! She 185
gave it him, and he hath given it his whore.

165. **should be.** See note on 3.3.381.

170. **rail,** raise a clamour.

180. **his vice.** his misconduct, his misdoing (cp. "a small vice," 4. 3. 70),

184. **by this hand.** A characteristic phrase of Iago: cp. note on 4. 2. 196.

Oth. I would have him nine years a-killing. A fine woman ! a fair woman ! a sweet woman !

Iago. You must forget that. *Her virtue sd be turned to pitch.* 190

Oth. Ay, let her rot, and perish, and be damn'd to-night ; for she shall not live. No, my heart is turn'd to stone ; I strike it, and it hurts my hand. Oh, the world hath not a sweeter creature ! She might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks. 195

Iago. Nay, that's not your way.

Oth. Hang her ! I do but say what she is. So delicate with her needle ! an admirable musician ! Oh, she will sing the savageness out of a bear : 200 of so high and plenteous wit and invention !

Iago. She's the worse for all this.

Oth. Oh, a thousand thousand times. And then, of so gentle a condition !

188. have him nine years a-killing, have him put to death by slow torture.

197. that's not your way : a repetition of 190.

" You must not permit your mind to dwell upon your wife's beauty and attractions."

201. invention, imagination

202. She's the worse for all that. These words form a counterpart to 3. 3. 183-186.

As long as he thought his wife to be virtuous, he regarded her accomplishments as an aggrandizement to her virtue ; but now that he thinks her false he regards them as an aggravation of her crimes.

" Let Desdemona once appear guilty, and all the whiteness of her soul is the white hypocrisy that makes the black all the blacker." Moulton.



Iago. Ay, too gentle.

Oth. Nay, that's certain. But yet the pity of it,

Iago! Oh, *Iago*, the pity of it, *Iago!*

Iago. If you are so fond over her iniquity, give her
patent to offend; for, if it touch not you, it

comes near nobody.

Oth. I will chop her into messes. Cuckold me!

Iago Oh, 'tis foul in her.

Oth. With mine officer!

205. **Ay, too gentle.** "Here the exceeding softness of Desdemona's temper is turned against her by Iago, so that it suddenly strikes Othello in a new point of view, as the inability to resist temptation." (Mrs. Jameson). The word "gentle" in Iago's mouth = "tractable" in the invidious sense in which that word is used in *Pericles*, 4. 6. 211.

208-210. **so fond over**, so crazy, so weak-minded about.
patent to offend, liberty to transgress.. **touch**, affect.
comes near, concerns.

Oh. Iago, the pity of it, Iago, Othello's passionate outburst meant much the same as if he had said, "Is it not heart-breaking?" But Iago, with freezing cynicism, not unmixed with contempt and impatience, puts a construction upon Othello's words (cp. 3. 3. 129 and 193) which he knows will exasperate him beyond endurance—saying to him in effect, "If you have so much indulgence for your wife as you seem to show, if 'swelling pity smothers wrath,' you ought to wink at her infidelities as so many husbands would do in your place. If you are indifferent, it concerns nobody else."

This is perhaps the most diabolical speech in the play, and it acts upon Othello like fire upon gunpowder. His next utterance (after "Oh, the pity of it Iago") is "I will chop her into messes!" What a revulsion of feeling is revealed in these words!

211. **chop her into messes**, makes mince-meat of her; utterly destroy her. Cp. 2. 3. 152.



Iago. That's fouler.

215

Oth. Get me some poison, Iago; this night. I'll not expostulate with her, lest her body and beauty unprovide my mind again. This night, Iago.

Iago. Do it not with poison; strangle her in her bed, even the bed she hath contaminated. 220

Oth. Good, good; the justice of it pleases; very good.

Iago. And for Cassio, let me be his undertaker: you shall hear more by midnight. 225

A trumpet.

217. **expostulate**, enter into discourse. (See *Hamlet*, 2. 2. 86).

218. **unprovide my mind**, weaken my resolution, make me waver. See note on 3. 3. 278.

224. **Let me be his undertaker**, let me deal with him, let me settle him.

226-293. An event now takes place which marks a fresh turn of affairs and—as we shall presently see—hurries on the final catastrophe. This is the arrival from Venice of an especial commission, headed by Lodovico, a kinsman of Brabantio, with a mandate from the Duke and the senators relieving Othello of his governorship and appointing Cassio in his place.

Desdemona, who enters with the strangers, on hearing the news expresses her gratification on Cassio's account. All Othello's worst suspicions are thus confirmed from his lady's own lips, and in a fit of rage he strikes her and affronts her in the presence of the Venetian envoy and departs from the scene in strange excitement. Lodovico is utterly at a loss to comprehend what he has seen and heard and he says to Iago (whose reticence only increases his misgiving):—

I am sorry that I am deceiv'd in him.



Enter Lodovico, Desdemona, and Attendants.

Oth. Excellent good. What trumpet is that same?

Iago. I warrant, something from Venice. 'Tis
Lodovico, this, comes from the Duke. See,
your wife's with him.

Lod. God save the worthy general!

Oth. With all my heart, sir.

Lod. The Duke and senators of Venice greet you. 230

[*Gives him a letter.*]

Oth. I kiss the instrument of their pleasures.

[*Opens the letter, and peruses it.*]

Des. And what's the news, good cousin Lodovico?

Iago. I am very glad to see you, signior;

Welcome to Cyprus.

Lod. I thank you. How does Lieutenant Cassio? 235

Iago. Lives, sir.

Des. Cousin, there's fallen between him and my lord
An unkind breach; but you shall make all well. *a rupture*

Oth. Are you sure of that? *deep thoughts that*

Des. My lord!

Oth. [*reads.*] "This fail not to do, as you will," 240

Lod. He did not call; he's busy in the paper.

Is there division 'twixt my lord and Cassio?

229. **with all my heart,** *i.e., I greet you with all my heart.*

231. **the instrument** etc., the document in which their wishes are expressed.

236. **Lives, sir.** He lives, he is living, sir.

238. **My lord!** Desdemona is startled by the vehemence of Othello's question.



Des. A most unhappy one. I would do much
To atone them, for the love I bear to Cassio. (1)

Oth. Fire and brimstone!

Des. My lord?

Oth. Are you wise? 245

Des. What, is he augry?

Lod. May be the letter mov'd him;
For, as I think, they do command him home
Deputing Cassio in his government.

Des. Trust me, I am glad on't. (2)

244. to atone them, to reconcile them.

The word "atone" is formed by the coalescence of at + one. Shakespeare makes "one" rhyme with "bone," "loan," etc. and this older sound is still heard in our present pronunciation of "atone."

244. for the love I bear to Cassio. Desdemona never loses sight of her promise. (3. 3. 20 ff.).

She uses "love" in the accepted Elizabethan meaning of "friendship" (so often exemplified in this play), and her fearless use of the word is quite enough in itself to prove the perfect innocence of her relations with Cassio; but Othello, in his present mood, cannot help construing it as damning evidence of her guilt.

Desdemona is tactless, even stupid if the truth must be said; but let us remember that she is a mere girl (1. 3. 95), with no experience of the world.

"She is relieved to think that her importunity is no longer required. If it is strange that she should not realize the wound to Othello's honour, the audience has been prepared for this obtuseness in an earlier scene. (3. 3. 84 ff.) Lewis Campbell, *Tragic Drama*, p. 242.

245. Fire and brimstone! An execration referring to the torments of the damned (*Revelation*, 14. 10).

Are you wise? Many critics look upon this as an aside spoken by Iago to warn Othello to restrain his passion.

Oth.

Indeed !

Des.

My lord ?

Oth. I am glad to see you mad.

Des.

Why, sweet Othello,—

Oth. [*Striking her.*] Devil !

251

Des. I have not deserv'd this.

Lod. My lord, this would not be believ'd in Venice

Though I should swear I saw't. 'Tis very much.

Make her amends : she weeps.

Oth.

Great words,

O devil, devil ! 255

If that the earth could teem with woman's
tears,

250. I am glad to see you mad. This appears to be only a furious man's way of saying, "I am mad to see you glad."

251. [*Striking her.*] It is not Othello who strikes this blow, but the wreck of Othello—"he that was Othello." Nor is it Desdemona whom he strikes, but the hideous distortion of that innocent lady conjured up in his mind by Iago's devilish art. To judge Othello as his maker meant us to judge him, we ought to proceed on the assumption that Desdemona was really guilty of the crime brought against her.

She is to him, at the time he strikes her, the vile creature who has destroyed in him every illusion that makes life worth living ; doubtless, too, the prime mover in bringing about his deposition ; and he believes that at this moment she is conspiring with her paramour to put him to death (see 130, above)—and that after getting him out of the way, she will marry Cassio and continue to fill her present sphere as the governor's wife in Cyprus.—No wonder, he thinks, she is "glad on't" when she learns the news of Cassio's appointment in his place !

256. teem with woman's tears, produce living creatures from woman's tears.



Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile.
Out of my sight !

Des. I will not stay to offend you.

[*Going.*]

Lod. Truly, an obedient lady :

I do beseech your lordship, call her back.

260

Oth. Mistress !

Des. My lord ?

Oth. What would you with her, sir ?

Lod. Who, I, my lord ?

Oth. Ay ; you did wish that I would make her turn.

Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on,

And turn again ; and she can weep, sir, weep ; 265

And she's obedient, as you say, obedient,

Very obedient. (*Proceed you in your tears.*)

Concerning this, sir, (*O well-painted passion !*)

I am commanded home. (*Get you away ;*)

257. **Each drop she falls, every tear-drop Desdemona sheds. prove a crocodile, grow into a crocodile.**

In the popular animal lore of Shakespeare's time crocodiles were said to allure their victims by shedding tears before them, and so this reptile became the type of perfidy and hypocrisy ; hence the expression " crocodile tears " = feigned or insincere tears.

263. **make her turn, call her back.**

264. **turn, and turn, etc.,** Othello refers to her supposed fickleness. See note on 205, above.

263-274. This speech is mainly addressed to Lodovico, but it contains four " asides " addressed to Desdemona, which are indicated in the text by means of parentheses. (Cp. Brabantio's speech on p. 19).

268. **well-painted passion.** Her weeping appears to him merely to be very clever *acting*.



I'll send for you anon.) Sir, I obey the man- 279
date,

And will return to Venice. (Hence, avaunt !)
[Exit Desdemona.]

Cassio shall have my place. And, sir, to-night,
I do entreat that we may sup together.

You are welcome, sir, to Cyprus.—Goats and
monkeys ! *Exit.*

Lod. Is this the noble Moor whom our full Senate 275
Call all in all sufficient ? Is this the nature
Whom passion could not shake ? whose solid
virtue

The shot of accident nor dart of chance
Could neither graze nor pierce ?

Iago. He is much chang'd.

Lod. Are his wits safe ? Is he not light of brain ? 280

Iago. He's that he is ; I may not breathe my censure
What he might be. If what he might he is not,
I would to heaven he were !

274. **Goats and monkeys !** An echo, perhaps, of Iago's words in 3. 3. 403.

275. **our full senate**, *i.e.*, met in full numbers.

276. **sufficient** has the same sense as in 3. 4. 91, above.

278. This line reminds us of the " slings and arrows of outrageous fortune " in *Hamlet*.

280. **safe**, in sound condition. **light of brain**, delirious.

281. **breathe my censure**, whisper my *opinion* (cp. 2. 31. 93).

282. **What he might be**, as to what might be the matter with him. **If what...he were**, If he is not the man whom we all believed him to be, I wish to heaven he *was* such a man.

Lod. What, strike his wife !

Iago. Faith, that was not so well ; yet would I knew
That stroke would prove the worst !

Lod. Is it his use ? 285

Or did the letters work upon his blood,
And new-create this fault ? *originate*

Iago. Alas, alas !

It is not honesty in me to speak
What I have seen and known. You shall
observe him,

And his own courses will denote him so 290
That I may save my speech. Do but go after,
And mark how he continues.

Lod. I am sorry that I am deceiv'd in him.

Scene II.

[*A room in the castle.*]

Enter Othello and Emilia.

Oth. You have seen nothing, then ? *official relation*

Emil. Nor ever heard, nor ever did suspect.

284. **not so well** : cp. " *not so good now*," 23, above.

285. **his use**, his habit, his custom.

288. **honesty**, decency, decorum.

290. **courses**, goings-on, strange behaviour. **denote**
him, show his real nature.

291. **save my speech**. Iago knows when silence is
more significant than speech.

Cp. note on 3, 3. 120. He is merely practising an old trick on a new
victim.

Oth. Yes, you have seen Cassio and she together.

Emil. But then I saw no harm, and then I heard
Each syllable that breath made up between
them.

Oth. What, did they never whisper ?

Emil. Never, my lord.

Oth. Nor send you out o' the way ?

Emil. Never.

Oth. To fetch her fan, her gloves, her mask, nor
nothing ?

Emil. Never, my lord.

10

Oth. That's strange.

Emil. I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest,

1-94. Othello here subjects Desdemona's attendant to a mock trial with regard to her mistress's suspected infidelities with Cassio, and sees in the honest woman's denials merely a piece of brazen-faced effrontery. On the assumption that she makes money out of her connivance at secret meetings between Desdemona and her supposed lovers, Othello sends Emilia to fetch her mistress ; and, when Desdemona appears, bids Emilia shut the door and give them a specimen of her proficiency in her profession.

Othello, now left alone with his lady, is bewitched (as he at always is, in spite of Iago's calumnies) by her innocence and loveliness, though to his disordered vision she is none the less a devil because she looks so like an angel. After outraging her modesty by accusations the very meaning of which she is almost too innocent to understand, he calls out for Emilia and throws a purse of money at her as a reward for her services as door-keeper—after which he leaves the two women alone to talk over the strange occurrence.

3. **and she**, and her.

9. **nor nothing**, nor anything.

12. **to wager**, wager: **honest**: see note on 3. 3. 103.



Lay down my soul at stake. If you think other,
 Remove your thought ; it doth abuse your bosom.
 If any wretch have put this in your head, 15
 Let Heaven requite it with the serpent's curse !
 For, if she be not honest, chaste, and true,
 There's no man happy ; the purest of their wives
 Is foul as slander.

Oth.

Bid her come hither ; go.

Exit Emilia.

She says enough ; yet she's a simple bawd 20
 That cannot say as much. This is a subtle whore,
 A closet lock and key of villanous secrets ;
 And yet she'll kneel and pray ; I have seen her do't.

13. lay down ... stake : cp. 1. 3. 295. other, otherwise.

14. Remove the thought, i.e., banish it from your mind. abuse your bosom, deceive your soul.

16. the serpent's curse, the curse pronounced upon the serpent : see *Genesis*, 3. 14.

20. says is emphatic. yet she's ... as much, yet she would be a very simple-minded bawd who could not say as much as that to shield her employers.

22. "One who keeps her mistress's secrets as safe as in a locked-up cupboard."

23. And yet ... kneel and pray. "Emilia is influenced by the purity with which she comes in contact day by day. She appreciates the goodness which she has never seen exemplified before. She learns to love her gentle mistress, and thus is ennobled inwardly." Milfer.

"A gentle lady once made to me this fine remark,—'Emilia has not much worth in herself, but is raised into worth by her contact with Desdemona'—into heroic worth!" Christopher North.

Enter Desdemona and Emilia.

Des. My lord, what is your will ?

Oth. Pray, chuck, come hither.

Des. What is your pleasure ?

Oth. Let me see your eyes ; 25

Look in my face.

Des. What horrible fancy's this ?

Oth. [To Emilia.] Some of your function, mistress ;

Leave procreants alone and shut the door ;

Cough, or cry "hem," if anybody come.

Your mystery, your mystery ; nay, dispatch. 30

Exit Emilia.

Des. Upon my knee, what doth your speech import ?

I understand a fury in your words,

[But not the words.]

Oth. Why, what art thou ?

Des. Your wife,*my lord ; your true

And loyal wife.

Oth. Come, swear it, damn thyself ; 35

Lest, being like one of heaven, the devils themselves

24. **chuck** : see note on 3. 4. 49.

25. "She looks up, but, frightened by his piercing glare, drops her eyes again." Booth.

27. **function**, service (as in 30, below).

29. **cry "hem."** Clear your throat, as a token of warning.

30. **your mystery**, your trade or profession.

This word is connected with Latin *ministerium* = a handicraft, and has no connection with "mystery" = a secret or religious rite, which is a word of Greek origin.

Should fear to seize thee ; therefore be double
damn'd.

Swear thou art honest.

Des. Heaven doth truly know it.

Oth. Heaven truly knows that thou art false as hell.

Des. To whom, my lord ? With whom ? How am I
false ? 40

Oth. Ah, Desdemon ! Away ! away ! away ! *overcome*

Des. Alas the heavy day ! Why do you weep ?

Am I the motive of these tears, my lord ?

rise above my father
If haply you my father do suspect

An instrument of this your calling back, 45

Lay not your blame on me. If you have lost
him,

Why, I have lost him too.

37. **be double damn'd**—by adding perjury to adultery.

43. **the motive** = "the occasion" (Quarto).

44-45. "If you suspect my father of having intrigued
to bring about your deposition.

This conjecture shows how far she is from suspecting the real
cause of Othello's derangement ; which, indeed, she does not discover
till she is actually upon her death-bed (5. 2. 51).

47-64. This speech, with those that follow, might almost be des-
cribed as "the lamentations of Othello." They contain distant echoes
of passages in the Old Testament writings, such as those setting forth
Job's trials at the hands of Satan and Jeremiah's at the hands of his
unfeeling countrymen.

"If heaven" he says in effect, "had ordained to afflict me with
pestilence or poverty or imprisonment, I could have found in my
soul a drop of patience to enable me to bear up against such trials.
Or if I had been singled out from my kind and made a bye-word and
a proverb in all men's mouths, even that would not have been beyond



Oth.

Had it pleas'd Heaven

To try me with affliction ; had they rain'd
 All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head,
 Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips,
 Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,
 I should have found in some place of my soul
 A drop of patience. But, alas, to make me
 The fixed figure for the time of scorn
 To point his slow and moving finger at !

50

the limits of my endurance. But to have found out that the woman in whom I placed my perfect trust, who was more than all the world to me, the source of all my joys, the centre of all my hopes, and apart from whom life itself had no meaning—to have found out that same woman to be the vilest of all the vile things imaginable !—where was there patience to endure a trial like that ? ”

48. **they**, the heavenly powers, the gods.

49. **sores and shames**, shameful sores. Hendiadys.

50. **Steep'd ... lips**. An idiomatic phrase=“reduced me to beggary.”

53. **a drop**, at least a drop.

53-54. **to make me The fixed figure**, etc., to make of me a world's wonder.

Othello could have endured even to be made “a very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people.” Some interpreters are more specific : “to be tied to the stake” (Montégut), “to be set in the pillory” (Tudor Shakespeare). Steevens's explanation, viz., that **fingers** refer to the hands of a clock and **time** to the effigy surmounting it, has been widely adopted, but it seems to us to rob the passage of its pathos and grandeur.

55. **slow and moving**, slowly moving.

The Quarto reading, “slow, unmoving,” would mean “so slow that it seems not to move.”

Yet could I bear that too, well, very well ;
 But there, where I have garner'd up my heart,
 Where either I must live, or bear no life ;
 The fountain from the which my current runs,
 Or else dries up ; to be discarded thence ! 60
 Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads
 To knot and gender in ! Turn thy complexion
 there ;
 Patience, thou young and rose-lipp'd cherubin,
 Ay, there look grim as hell !

Des. I hope my noble lord esteems me honest. 65

57-60. Note the rapid succession of metaphors :—

(1) Desdemona has been not merely his treasure but his treasury, the bank containing all his wealth.

(2) Life conceived apart from her is intolerable and meaningless.

(3) She has been to him like a fountain in the desert of his existence. [In *Proverbs*, 5, 18, "fountain" is put for "wife" ; "Let thy fountain be blessed : and rejoice with the wife of thy youth."]

61. a cistern, etc. In scriptural imagery a "broken cistern," (which soon becomes the habitation of unclean creatures), is the type at once of falsity and pollution.

For the contrary figure cp. "My spouse [is] a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" *Song of Solomon*, 4. 12.

62. knot, gather into clusters. gender, breed.

Cp. "I do hate a proud man, as I hate the engendering of toads." *Troilus and Cressida*, 2. 3. 169.

Turn thy complexion, there, change your colour (as you hear yourself thus described.)

Desdemona's blushes are taken to be a confession of guilt. Cp. note on 5. 1. 109-110.

63-64. Apostrophising Patience as a young and rose-lipped cherubin (=cherub), he bids her look on his wife and assume the hue of hell.

Oth. Oh, ay ; as summer flies are in the shambles,
That quicken even with blowing. Oh, thou weed,

Who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet
That the sense aches at thee, would thou
hadst ne'er been born !

Des. Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed ?

Oth. Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,
Made to write "whore" upon ? What committed !

67. **quicken ... blowing**, begin to breed as soon as they are hatched.

Oh, thou weed ; morally worthless, though delicately fashioned and pleasant to the senses like a flower. Cp. 5. 2. 20. ("So sweet was ne'er so fatal.")

69. **that the sense aches at thee** ; from very excess of joy. Cp. *Troilus and Cressida*, 3. 2. 24: "Joy too fine ... too sharp in sweetness."

Keats gives expression to this idea in *The Nightingale* ("being too happy in thy happiness") and in his *Endymion* :

I am pain'd,
Endymion : woe ! woe ! is grief contain'd
In the very deeps of pleasure, my sole life ?

'Tis the pest
Of love, that fairest joys give most unrest.

71. **fair paper ... goodly book**. Desdemona's face. Cp. *Lucrece*, 1053 :

Though men can cover crimes with bold, stern books,
Poor women's faces are their own faults' books.

72. **What committed** ? Desdemona uses the word in the general sense of "perpetrate," but Othello takes it up in the special sense, "to commit adultery."



Committed! O thou public commoner!
 I should make very forges of my cheeks,
 That would to cinders burn up modesty, 75
 Did I but speak thy deeds. What committed!
 Heaven stops the nose at it, and the moon
 winks,

The bawdy wind, that kisses all it meets,
 Is hush'd within the hollow mine of earth,
 And will not hear it. What committed! 80
 [Impudent strumpet!]

Des. By heaven, you do me wrong.

Oth. Are not you a strumpet?

Des. No, as I am a Christian.

If to preserve this vessel for my lord
 From any other foul unlawful touch
 Be not to be a strumpet, I am none. 85

73. **public commoner**, a prostitute.

Cassio's words describing Bianca are obviously in Othello's mind.

(4. 1. 123)

77. **winks**, shuts her eyes.

78. **the bawdy wind**, the wanton wind.

79. **the hollow mine of earth**, the subterranean cavity supposed to be the home (or the prison) of the winds.

83. **this vessel**, this body of mine.

Other instances of "vessel" = "body" could be cited from Shakespeare; cp. *Timon of Athens*, 5. 1. 204, "Nature's fragile vessel," and the quotation in the note on 4. 3. 32, below. The figure seems to be taken from the potter's art, and is of biblical origin. Cp. *1 Samuel*, 21. 5, "The vessels of the young men are holy" (= their bodies are ceremonially clean.) In this, and other biblical instances, "vessel" is the rendering of the Vulgate *vas* = vase.

Oth. What, not a whore?

Des. No, as I shall be sav'd.

Oth. Is't possible?

Des. O, Heaven forgive us!

Oth. I cry you mercy, then.

I took you for that cunning whore of Venice
That married with Othello. [*Raising his voice.*]

—You, mistress,

90

Re-enter Emilia.

That have the office opposite to Saint Peter,
And keeps the gate of hell! You, you, ay, you!
We have done our course; there's money for
your pains.

I pray you, turn the key and keep our counsel.

Exit.

Emil. Alas, what does this gentlemen conceive?

95

88. **I cry you mercy.** An ironical begging of pardon.

89. **I took you...with Othello.** If you are not Desdemona, you are singularly like her! Am I speaking, then, to Desdemona's "double"?

This ironical speech shows how utterly Iago's slanders have poisoned his mind against his wife.

91. **opposite to (that of) Saint Peter.**

The office of St. Peter was to keep the keys of the gate of heaven. Othello regards his house as a hell, and therefore speaks of Emilia's office as the contrary to that of St. Peter.

95-171. "Emilia," says Lady Martin, in her volume of stage reminiscences, "finds Desdemona on the floor, to which she had sunk after making oath, on her knees, of her being to Othello 'a true and honourable wife.' Think how stunned and bewildered she must be! She is accused of a crime beyond all others most foreign to her nature. She can imagine no motive for the accusation—has no clue to

How do you, madam? How do you my good lady?

Des. Faith, half asleep.

Emil. Good madam, what's the matter with my lord?

Des. With who?

Emil. Why, with my lord, madam.

100

Des. Who is thy lord?

Emil. He that is yours, sweet lady.

Des. I have none. Do not talk to me, Emilia;

I cannot weep, nor answers have I none

the 'With whom? How am I false?' It is like a hideous dream, and, with a pathos unsurpassed, to my thinking, in poetry, she answers Emilia's question, 'How do you, my good lady?' with 'Faith, half asleep.'

"Then follows that most pathetic scene, in which she touchingly appeals for help to her destroyer, and asks, 'Am I that name, Iago?'

'What name, fair lady?' Not being able to utter the foul word herself, she answers, 'Such as she says my lord did say I was.' She fears that in his anger Othello may shake her off 'to beggarly divorcement.' Yet as she ever did, so she ever will, 'love him dearly.' She has to put up with the cold comfort which Iago gives—pretending to know nothing, catching with trembling eagerness at his suggestion—

'The business of the state does him offence,
And he does chide with you'."

97. **Faith, half asleep.** Her nature is stunned by Othello's attack upon her.

For *drowsiness* resulting from *dejection* (the English word *heavy* expresses both ideas) cp. *Richard III.* 1. 4. 74 :

My soul is *heavy*, and I fain would *sleep*.

103. **I cannot weep :** because hers is "the grief which burns worse than tears drown" (*Winter's Tale*, 2. 1. 111).

Byron says in *Don Juan*, (vi. 20) :

"Our *least* of sorrows are such as we *weep*."



But what should go by water. Prithee, to-night
Lay on my bed my wedding sheets, remember ; 105
And call thy husband hither.

Emil. Here's a change indeed !

Exit.

Des. 'Tis meet I should be us'd so, very meet.

Des. How have I been behav'd, that he might stick
The small'st opinion on my least misuse?

Re-enter Emilia with Iago.

Iago. What is your pleasure, madam ? How is't
with you ? 110

104. **go by water**, be expressed by tears.

107. This line, we think, is ironical, though sometimes understood literally.

108-109. **been behaved**, behaved myself. **opinion**,
censure. **misuse**, misdeed.

"Desdemona cannot imagine any trifling fault that she has committed which would serve as a peg for Othello to hang his dreadful opinion upon." *Tudor Shakespeare.*

110-171. Every one in serious difficulty seems to make a confidant of IAGO and to pay the most earnest heed to his advice. And Desdemona is no exception. When Iago now appears upon the scene, it is in consequence of his being sent for by her (106), but *Emilia* has to explain what *Desdemona* wants, viz., to find out from him the reason for Othello's calling her a "whore"; a word that is not in *Desdemona*'s vocabulary and the very meaning of which is scarcely intelligible to her ("Am I that name, Iago?")

She asks Iago's advice as to how she is to win her lord again, and strangely entreats him to act the part of mediator. Iago tells her she must not take the matter too seriously; that the business of the state is the real cause of his present irritation, and his rude behaviour to her due merely to mental distraction.

Des. I cannot tell. Those that do teach young babes
Do it with gentle means and easy tasks.
He might have chid me so ; for, in good faith,
I am a child to chiding.

Iago. What's the matter, lady ?

Emil. Alas, Iago, my lord hath so bewhor'd her, 113
Thrown such despite and heavy terms upon her,
That true hearts cannot bear.

Des. Am I that name, Iago ?

Iago. What name, fair lady ?

Des. Such as she said my lord did say I was.

Emil. He call'd her whore. A beggar in his drink 120

Could not have laid such terms upon his callet. *mistress*

Iago. What did he so ?

Des. I do not know ; I am sure I am none such.

Iago. Do not weep, do not weep. Alas the day !

Emil. Hath she forsook so many noble matches, 125

Her father and her country and her friends,

To be call'd whore ? Would it not make one weep ?

Des. It is my wretched fortune.

Never in the play is the contrast so great as here between the two sides of Iago—Iago as he appears and Iago as he truly is.

118. **That name**, *viz.*, "whore," implied in "bewhor'd."

What name, fair lady ? The question seems to be asked for no other reason than to force her to repeat the odious word in his hearing.

121. **his callet**, his trull, his mistress.

125. **Forsook**, forsaken, declined, refused.

128. **It is my wretched fortune.** Desdemona is in a quandary, a bewildering mental perplexity : (1) she can see no cause of offence in *herself* ; (2) to conceive that *her husband* could be at fault is beyond the stretch of her imagination ; (3) so she is forced to fall back on *her unlucky stars* as the cause of her misery.

Iago. Beshrew him for it !

How comes this trick upon him ?

Des. Nay, Heaven doth know.

Emil. I will be hang'd, if some eternal villain, 130
Some busy and insinuating rogue,
Some cogging, cozening slave, to get some office,
Have not devis'd this slander. I'll be hang'd
else.

The name "Desdemona" in Greek means "she whose fortune is wretched." "Among all Shakespeare's heroines," says John W. Hales in an essay on *Shakespeare's Greek Names*, "she is emphatically 'the ill-starred one.' So lovely, so loving, so accomplished, and true and pure, and yet perishing so miserably ! Desdemona is one of Fate's choicest victims. Her 'graces serve' her 'but as enemies.' Her very virtues bring on her ruin. What is most innocent is constructed into evidence against her. In obeying the best instincts of her clear spirit she excites the vilest suspicions and secures the bitterest condemnation. The truth from her lips is turned into a lie. We said that the name is from the Greek *dusdaimōn*, 'ill-starred'; but we may go further and say it is merely a variation of *dusdaimōnia*, 'ill-starredness.' She is not only unhappy, she is unappiness itself."

Beshrew him for it. Iago is playing the innocent, and uses a *woman's oath* (cp. 3. 4. 150).

129. **trick**, freakishness.

130-133. **busy**, officious, interfering (cp. "too busy," 3. 3. 253). **insinuating**, artful, plausible. **cogging**, employing fraud. **cozening**, beguileful.

"To *cog* was to load dice for the purpose of cheating. The word *cozen* was borrowed from *cousin* (Lat. *consanguineus*), and meant to cheat under pretence of relationship or kindred feeling. Shakespeare often quibbles on the word *cousin*." Hunter.

Though this description suits Iago down to the ground, it does not seem to occur to Emilia that her husband is the scoundrel whom she is denouncing. "Witness her incredulity, in the Last



Iago. Fie, there is no such man ; it is impossible.

Des. If any such there be, Heaven pardon him ! 135

Emil. A halter pardon him ! and hell gnaw his bones !

Why should he call her whore ? Who keeps
her company ?

What place ? what time ? what form ? what
likelihood ?

The Moor's abus'd by some most villanous knave,
Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow. 140

disreputable

Scene, when Othello tells her it was 'her husband' who first told him that Desdemona was false to wedlock." Furness.

134. **Fie !...it is impossible.** "This line expresses the thought under shelter of which Iago has lived and is living : other people do not believe that such a being exists." Brandes.

Bacon in his *Essay Of Simulation and Dissimulation* points out three degrees in the art of hiding and veiling of a man's self : (1) closeness, reservation, and secrecy ; (2) dissimulation in the negative ; (3) simulation in the affirmative when a man purposely and expressly feigns and pretends to be what he is not. In the practice of the *third* degree Iago is indeed a past-master.

The two opposing men in Iago have their doubles in Robert Louis Stevenson's story, the "Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." Dr. Jekyll the philanthropist, by means of a potion, now and then turns himself into a seemingly different person, known as Mr. Hyde, who takes a fiendish delight in committing crimes which sometimes set Scotland Yard on his track, but Mr. Hyde can always baffle his pursuers by resuming the character of Dr. Jekyll. But the counter-agent by which he resumes his own shape latterly fails to act, and the wretched man finds himself at the end of the story transformed beyond recall into the person of Mr. Hyde.

134, 135, 136. "All three characters stand out in clear relief in these three short speeches." Brandes.

O heavens, that such companions thou'dst unfold, *expose*
 And put in every honest hand a whip
 To lash the rascals naked through the world
 Even from the east to the west !

Iago. Speak within door.

Emil. O, fie upon them ! Some such squire he was 145
 That turn'd your wit the seamy side without,
 And made you to suspect me with the Moor.

Iago. You are a fool ; go to.

Des. Alas, Iago,

What shall I do to win my lord again ?

Good friend, go to him ; for, by this light of
 heaven, 150

I know not how I lost him. Here I kneel :

If e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love,

141. **companions**, fellows. Often employed contemptuously. **unfold**, expose (as in 5. 1. 21).

144. **Speak within door**, lower your voice, do not shout so as to be heard outside.

145. **squire**, young fellow (contemptuous). "A proper squire !" *Much Ado*, 1. 3. 54.

146. **the seamy side without**, inside out, as it were.

The "seamy side" of a garment is the side showing the seams and stitches, and therefore the less presentable side.

Iago expressed his jealousy of Emilia in his first and second soliloquies (1. 3. 393 and 2. 1. 301).

148. **You are a fool ; go to**. Iago would surely not answer his wife in this way, if he had any genuine grievance against her.

150. **by this light of heaven** : cp. 4. 3. 66.

Either in discourse of thought or actual deed,
Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense
Delighted them in any other form; 153

Or that I do not yet, and ever did,
And ever will—though he do shake me off
To beggarly divorcement—love him ^{earn} dearly,
Comfort forswear me! Unkindness may do
much; ^{desert}

And his unkindness may defeat my life, 160
But never taint my love. I cannot say “whore.”
It does abhor me now I speak the word;
To do the act that might the addition earn
Not the world’s mass of vanity could make me.

Iago. I pray you, be content; ’tis but his humour. 165
The business of the state does him offence,
[And he does chide with you.]

153. **discourse of thought**, process of reflection.

157. **And ever will**.—“Love is love for evermore.”

Tennyson, *Locksley Hall*.

157. **shake...divorcement**: cp. “whistle her...down
the wind,” 3. 3. 262.

159. **Comfort forswear me!** Let there be an end to
my happiness!

160. **defeat**, destroy. 162. **It does abhor me**, it horri-
fies me, it seems to defile my mouth.

163. **the addition**, the title.

164. **the world’s mass of vanity**, the whole of the
world’s wealth: cp. “all the world” (4. 3. 64; 68).

165. **be content**, never heed it!

167. **chide with you**, chide you, quarrel with you.
Iago’s idea had occurred to Desdemona herself (3. 4. 143-144).

Des. If 'twere no other,—

Iago. It is but so, I warrant.

[*Trumpets within.*]

Hark, how these instruments summon to
supper !

The messengers of Venice stay the meat. 170

Go in, and weep not ; all things shall be well.

Exeunt Desdemona and Emilia.

Enter Roderigo.

How now, Roderigo !

Rod. I do not find that thou deal'st justly with me.

170. **stay the meat,** are waiting for supper.

172-252. Pope begins a new scene here. The terrible cross-examination of Desdemona required the privacy of "a room in the castle," but Roderigo's interview with Iago demands a public place, such as the guard-room or the court before the castle. In the Elizabethan play-houses the traverse curtain would, at this point, be drawn across the stage.

We have seen nothing of Roderigo since Iago sent him off to his lodging shortly after his beating (2. 3. 388). He re-appears in much the same mood as last time (and, for that matter, as at the opening of the play) complaining that in spite of all his lavish expenditure he has made no progress with his love-suit. He is now at the end of his patience and comes to demand satisfaction with his sword, as he is no longer prepared to "put up in peace what already he has foolishly suffered." Iago smooths him down, as he has always done before, by means of flattery and fair promises, and then enlists his services in a plot to put Cassio to death. Othello, he points out, will presently take Desdemona away with him to Mauritania, unless his abode in Cyprus be lingered by some "accident," such as the "removing" of Cassio. After much persuasion Roderigo consents to put himself under Iago's direction.

Iago. What in the contrary? *put me off* 175

Rod. Every day thou daff'st me with some device,
Iago; and rather, as it seems to me now,
keep'st from me all conveniency than suppliest
me with the least advantage of hope. I will
indeed no longer endure it, nor am I yet 180
persuaded to put up in peace what already I
have foolishly suffered.

Iago. Will you hear me, Roderigo?

Rod. Faith, I have heard too much, for your words
and performances are no kin together. 185

Iago. You charge me most unjustly.

Rod. With nought but truth. I have wasted my-
self out of my means. The jewels you have had
from me to deliver Desdemona would half

175. **What in the contrary?** In what respect have I
acted contrary to just dealing?

176. **Every day.** This gives the impression of "long
time." Strictly they have been in Cyprus only *one* whole
day. **daff'st me ... device,** dost put me off with some excuse
or other.

"Daff" is only another form of "doff" = do off.

179. **advantage of hope,** advantage on which I can
build my hopes.

181. **put up in peace,** passively submit to.

183. **Will you hear me?** Cp. 1. 1. 3,

185. **are no kin together,** are very ill assorted, are
mutually opposed.

187. **I have ... my means,** I am at the end of my re-
sources.



have corrupted a votarist. You have told me she 190
hath received them and returned me expecta-
tions and comforts of sudden respect and ac-
quaintance, but I find none. *notice*

Iago. Well ; go to ; very well.

Rod. Very well ! go to ! I cannot go to, man ; nor 195
'tis not very well. By this hand, I say 'tis
scurvy, and begin to find myself fopped in it.

Iago. Very well.

Rod. I tell you 'tis not very well. I will make my-
self known to Desdemona. If she will return 200
me my jewels, I will give over my suit and
repent my unlawful solicitation ; if not, assure
yourself I will seek satisfaction of you. *open throat*

190. **a votarist**, a nun, a woman under vow of chas-
tity.

191-93. **and returned ... acquaintance**, and in return
has given me assurances of very early attentions from her.

196. **By this hand**. A gesture characteristic of *Iago* (see note
on 2. 1. 262)—by *Roderigo* now used in mockery.

197. **fopped**, duped, fooled.

199. **make myself known to Desdemona**. "Can this refer
to anything else but his disguise—his favour, defeated with an usurped
beard? (1. 3. 345)." Furness.

202. **unlawful solicitation**, illicit courtship.

203. **seek satisfaction of you**. *Roderigo* means that
he will challenge *Iago* to personal combat.

"'Mr. Balfour,' said Morton, laying his hand on his sword, 'this
language requires *satisfaction*.'" *Old Mortality*, ch. xxvi.

Roderigo had said he would not "put up in peace" (181) what he had
suffered, and his next speech (205) shows that he meant what he said.
Iago compliments him upon his prowess ("Why, now, I see there's

Iago. You have said now.

Rod. Ay, and I have said nothing but what I protest 205
intendment of doing.

Iago. Why, now I see there's mettle in thee, and
even from this instant do build on thee a better
opinion than ever before. Give me thy hand,
Roderigo. Thou hast taken against me a most 210
objection just exception; but yet, I protest, I have dealt
most directly in thy affair.

Rod. It hath not appeared. *honestly*

Iago. I grant indeed it hath not appeared and your
suspicion is not without wit and judgement. 215
But, Roderigo, if thou hast that in thee indeed,
which I have greater reason to believe now than
ever (I mean purpose, courage, and valour), this
night show it. If thou the next night following
enjoy not Desdemona, take me from this world 220
with treachery and devise engines for my life.

mettle in thee," 207), and shakes hands to make up the quarrel. He gives him greater hope of success than ever, inasmuch as he has given such proof of his "purpose, courage, and valour" (218).—"The brave deserve the fair."

"Satisfaction" has the same sense in *Cymbeline* (2. 1. 16), where Cloten complains that his being of royal blood robs him of his fair share of fighting: "I give him *satisfaction*? Would he were one of my rank! ... They dare not fight with me... Every Jack-slave hath his bellyful of fighting, and I must up and down like a cock that nobody can match."

205. **protest intendment**, assert intention.

207. **mettle**, courage. 211. **exception**, objection.

212. **directly**, honestly.

221. **devise ... life**, contrive instruments of torture to destroy me.



Rod. Well, what is it? Is it within reason and compass?

Iago. Sir, there is especial commission come from Venice to depute Cassio in Othello's place. 225

Rod. Is that true? Why, then Othello and Desdemona return again to Venice.

Iago. O, no; he goes into Mauritania and taketh away with him the fair Desdemona, unless his abode be lingered here by some accident; wherein none can be so determinate as the removing of Cassio. 230

Rod. How do you mean, removing him?

Iago. Why, by making him incapable of Othello's place; knocking out his brains. 235

Rod. And that you would have me to do?

Iago. Ay, if you dare do yourself a profit and a right. He sups to-night with a harlotry, and thither will I go to him; he knows not yet of his honourable fortune. If you will watch 240

Shakespeare here gives us a pleasant anticipation of 5. 2. 332-335.

223. **within ... compass**, practicable. 226. **depute**, appoint.

229. **Mauritania**. This geographical term corresponds to the present Morocco and Algiers.

It was named after the *Mauri*, as the Moors were styled by the Romans.

231. **lingered**, delayed. 232. **determinate**, decisive.

235. The slow-witted Roderigo fails to understand Iago's euphemism for murder (**the removing of Cassio**).

239. **a harlotry**, a harlot.

Poorly
abide

effectual

what can we do now
is to prolong Othello's

his going thence, (which I will fashion to fall out between twelve and one) you may take him at your pleasure. I will be near to second your attempt, and he shall fall between us. Come, stand not amaz'd at it, but go along with me ; I will show you such a necessity in his death that you shall think yourself bound to put it on him. It is now high supper-time, and the night grows to waste. About it. 245 250

Rod. I will hear further reason for this.

Iago. And you shall be satisfied.

Exeunt.

Scene III.

[*Another room in the castle.*]

Enter Othello, Lodovico, Desdemona, Emilia, and Attendants.

Lod. I do beseech you, sir, trouble yourself no further.

Oth. O, pardon me ; 'twill do me good to walk.

249. **high supper-time**, quite time for supper.

250. The wasting night is compared to a candle.

1-11. Lodovico has been supping with Othello (4. 1. 273), and now the host courteously proposes to show his guest to his quarters.

2. **'twill do me good to walk**, the night air will cool my fevered brain. Cp. Prospero's words (*Tempest*, 4. 1. 162) :

A turn or two I'll walk
To still my beating mind.

Lod. Madam, good-night ; I humbly thank your ladyship.

Des. Your honour is most welcome.

Oth. Will you walk, sir ?
Oh,—Desdemona,— he is loathed to say it but yet he

Des. My lord ?

Oth. Get you to bed on the instant ; I will be returned forthwith. Dismiss your attendant there. Look't be done.

Des. I will, my lord.

10

Exeunt [Othello, Lodovico, and Attendants].

Emil. How goes it now ? He looks gentler than he did.

“ This is one of Shakespeare's subtle indications of physical condition ; it perfectly shows the restlessness, the mal-ease, the fret of limb and frame accompanying fever of the mind ” (Clarke).

9. **Look't be done.** See that it is done.

11. **He looks gentler.** “ He has determined to put her to death, and he is therefore able to suppress those starts of speech and that fierceness of glance which were uncontrollable while his soul was tossed with doubt and racked with suspense ” (Clarke).

12-106. Desdemona and Emilia are now left alone. “ While Emilia is ‘ unpinning ’ her mistress, I picture to myself Desdemona seated, her sad thoughts wandering far away, while Emilia uncoils the pearls from her hair, untwists its long plaits, and gathers them for the night in a loose braid at the back of her head. Her thoughts travel back to her childhood : she remembers Barbara, her mother's maid, who loved and was forsaken, and who died singing the sad old ditty that ‘ expressed her fortune.’ Little had Desdemona thought it was to be her death-song too !

“ After listening to some of Emilia's coarse, worldly maxims, she breaks away from the subject by saying—

‘ Good-night, good-night : heaven me such uses send,
Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend ! ’

Des. He says he will return incontinent ;
And hath commanded me to go to bed,
And bade me to dismiss you.

Emil. Dismiss me !

Des. It was his bidding ; therefore, good Emilia, 15
Give me my nightly wearing, and adieu.
We must not now displease him.

Emil. I would you had never seen him !

Des. So would not I. My love doth so approve him,
That even his stubbornness, his checks, his 20
frowns
(Prithee, unpin me) have grace and favour in
them.

Emil. I have laid those sheets you bade me on the bed.

"Although such heavy clouds had passed over her happiness, yet Desdemona still loved and trusted, and was not, therefore, altogether sad. She knows how to forgive—hopes what has been the mystery of Othello's unkindness is perhaps to be explained in the privacy of their chamber, when a word of regret, of remorse from him, will win her fullest pardon. There is almost something sublime in this unshaken love and trust. She falls asleep in it—for oh, such a rude awakening."
Lady Martin (*abbr.*).

12. **incontinent**, immediately. Cp. 1. 3. 306.

16. **wearing**, apparel.

20. **stubbornness**, roughness, harshness. **checks**, rebukes (cp. 1. 1. 149). 21. **favour**, attraction, charm.

The gentleness and dignity with which she bears her injuries put her on a level with the saints and martyrs. Always we find her thoughts directed outwards, not inwards—which preserves her from utter misery.

"I'll tell you what real love is. It is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself



Des. All's one.—Good father! how foolish are our minds! *fick*
If I do die before thee, prithee, shroud me
In one of those same sheets. *D. has the shadow of D.*

Emil. Come, come, you talk. *no 25 sense*

Des. My mother had a maid call'd Barbara;
She was in love, and he she lov'd prov'd mad *unfaithful*
And did forsake her. She had a song of "willow";
An old thing 'twas, but it express'd her fortune,
And she died singing it. That song to-night 30

and against the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter—as I did." Miss Havisham in Dickens's *Great Expectations*.

She loves with love that cannot tire,
And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
Through passionate duty love springs higher,
As grass grows taller round a stone.

Coventry Patmore, *The Wife's Tragedy*.

23. **Good father!** There is a touch of *eccentricity* in Desdemona and therefore (following the Cowden Clarkes) we permit the Folio's exclamation, in spite of its singularity, to stand in the text, in place of the nerveless "Good faith" of the Quarto.

Desdemona hesitates to give utterance to a wish that, to Emilia will appear unaccountable. The exclamation is in itself meaningless, being of the same order as *বাপের* in Bengali.

25. **you talk.** What nonsense you are talking?

27. **and he she lov'd prov'd mad.** "Perhaps from these words Desdemona imagines *Othello* may be going out of his mind, as she cannot explain or understand his altered conduct, and if so, her own present position would somewhat resemble that of *Barbara*." Canning.

28. **a song of "willow."** The "weeping, willow" with its drooping branches, was the emblem of disappointed love. *gates*
Cp. Merch. of Venice, 5. i. 10: of sorrow, of death. moon

On such a night

Stood Dido with a willow in her hand,

Upon the wild sea banks.

10. ... is very true in D. S. life. S.

long to sing in my ears
 Will not go from my mind ; I have much to do
 But to go hang my head all at one side
 And sing it like poor Barbara. Prithee, dispatch.

Emil. Shall I go fetch your night-gown ?

Des. No, unpin me here.

This Lodovico is a proper man. 35

Emil. A very handsome man.

Des. He speaks well.

Emil. I know a lady in Venice would have walked bare-foot to Palestine for a touch of his nether lip. 40

Des. [*Singing.*]

" The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,
 Sing all a green willow ; *mulberry*

Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,
 Sing willow, willow, willow.

The fresh streams ran by her, and murmur'd her *echoed her moans in ripples*
 moans ; *nature sympath* 45

Sing willow, willow, willow ;

Her salt tears fell from her, and soft'ned the stones ;

Sing willow, willow, willow ; "

31. **have much to do But to**, can hardly refrain from.

32. This beautiful line consists of monosyllables. No one can fail to perceive the meaning of Desdemona holding her head **all at one side**.

Hermione, another innocent lady whom her husband suspects of unfaithfulness, is similarly described (*Winter's Tale*, 3. 3. 20):

Some times her head on one side, some another.

34. **night-gown**, dressing-gown worn at night.

35. **proper**, comely, good-looking. 39. **a touch...lip**,
i.e., a kiss.

41-57. Desdemona here sings a few snatches from an old ballad. Many versions are in existence, one of which is in Percy's *Reliques*. It

(Lay by these)—

[*Singing.*] “Willow, willow, willow ;”

(Prithee, hie thee ; he’ll come anon) ;—

50

[*Singing.*]

“Sing all a green willow must be my garland.

Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve,”

(Nay, that’s not next.—Hark ! who is’t that knocks?

Emil. It’s the wind).

Des. [*Singing.*]

“I call’d my love false love ; but what said he
then ?

55

Sing willow, willow, willow.

If I court more women, you’ll couch with more
men.”—

So, get thee gone ; good-night. Mine eyes do itch ; *throb*

Doth that bode weeping ?

Emil. *forebode* ’Tis neither here nor there. 60

Des. I have heard it said so. O, these men, these men !

Dost thou in conscience think (tell me, Emilia),

That there be women do abuse their husbands

In such gross kind ?

Emil. There be some such, no question.

Des. Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world ?

was originally a man’s song, being entitled “A Lover’s Complaint,
being forsaken of his Love” ; but Shakespeare here makes it a woman’s
song to suit the dramatic situation.

50. **hie thee ; he’ll come anon.** Make haste, my hus-
band will be here presently.

52. **his scorn I approve,** *i.e., pronounce to be just.*
These words sound like an echo of 19-20, above. *very true in D. 5 lips*

59. **bode,** forebode, portend. *presentiment*,



Emil. Why, would not you ?

Des. No, by this heavenly light !

Emil. Nor I neither by this heavenly light ; 66
I might do't as well i' the dark.

Des. Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world ?

Emil. The world's a huge thing ; it is a great price
For a small vice.

Des. *She can't bring her.* In troth, I think thou wouldst not.

Emil. In troth, I think I should : and undo't when 71

be false to husband
I was
and my
hand being
ing him
so all
I had done. Marry, I would not do such a
thing for a joint-ring, nor for measures of lawn,
nor for gowns, petticoats, nor caps, nor any
petty exhibition ; but, for all the whole world,
—'ud's pity, who would not make her husband 75
a cuckold to make him a monarch ? I should
venture purgatory for't.

Des. Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong
For the whole world.

Emil. Why, the wrong is but a wrong i' the world ; 80
and having the world for your labour, 'tis a

71. **undo't**, make amends for it ; make it good to my husband.

73. **a joint-ring**, a finger-ring made in separate halves :
a common lovers' token in the olden time.

74. **petty exhibition**, paltry present. Cp. 1. 3. 238.

75. **'ud's pity**, God's pity. A minced form of "God" is common
in oaths. The Folio has "why."

77. **venture purgatory for't**, risk being punished in
purgatory for it.

80. **a wrong i'the world**, a wrong in the world's eye, a
conventional wrong.



wrong in your own world, and you might quickly make it right.

Des. I do not think there is any such woman.

Emil. Yes, a dozen ; and as many to the vantage 85
as would store the world they play'd for.

But I do think it is their husbands' faults

If wives do fall. Say that they slack their
duties

And pour our treasures into foreign laps,

Or else break out in peevish jealousies, *foolish (throwing restraint)* 90

Throwing restraint upon us ; or say they strike
us,

Or scant our former having in despite ;

Why, we have galls, and though we have some
grace,

Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know

85. **to the vantage**, into the bargain, in addition.

85-104. Emilia here speaks of husbands in general, but we feel that it is her own married life and her personal experience of Iago that she is describing.

86. **store**, stock, populate. 88. **slack**, be remiss in.

89. **pour ... laps**, give to other women what of right belongs to us.

" Foreign " (from Latin *foris*) literally = " out of doors," and is akin to " forest " and " forfeit."

91. **Throwing...upon us**, restraining our freedom of movement, making us stop at home.

92. **scant...in despite**, petulantly reduce our pin-money.

93. **galls**, spirit to resent injury or insult.

The gall or bile was supposed to be the source of anger.



Their wives have sense like them ; they see and
smell

95

And have their palates both for sweet and sour
As husbands have. What is it that they do
When they change us for others ? Is it sport ?
I think it is. And doth affection breed it ?

I think it doth. Is't frailty that thus errs ? 100

It is so too. And have not we affections, *indinations*
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have ?

Then let them use us well ; else let them know,
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.

Des. Good-night, good-night. Heaven me such uses
send,

105

Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend.

Exeunt.

95. sense, feeling.

99-100. **I think...I think.** Ironical as in 4. 1. 112.

105. **Heaven ... send,** *i.e.*, may heaven teach me so to
act. For **uses** = "lessons," cp. *As You Like It*, 2. 1. 12 :

• Sweet are the *uses* of adversity.

106. **Not to pick bad from bad,** not to pick up bad
practices from bad examples.

Cp. *Romans* 12, 21 : " Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil
with good."

Act Fifth

Scene I

[*Cyprus. A street.*]

Enter Iago and Roderigo.

Iago. Here, stand behind this bulk; straight will he come.

Wear thy good rapier bare, and put it home.

Quick, quick; fear nothing; I'll be at thy elbow.

It makes us, or it mars us; think on that,

And fix most firm thy resolution.

1.36. This scene takes place at the dead of night somewhere in the vicinity of the castle. Knowing that Cassio is about to pass this way on his return from Bianca's house (which was to be between twelve and one, 4. 2. 243), Iago has stationed Roderigo in an ambush and given him instructions to kill him as soon as he appears. When the critical moment arrives Roderigo fails to kill his man, but Iago rushes forward and cuts Cassio severely in the leg. Othello appears for a moment—merely as a spectator—and having satisfied himself that Iago has kept his word ("Let me be his undertaker," 4. 1. 224), departs from the scene with the determination to put Desdemona to death immediately.

1. **bulk**, a projecting part of a building, often a counter outside of a shop where articles were exposed for sale.

"He found a country fellow dead drunk, snorting [cp. 1. 1. 90.] on a bulk." Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

2. **put it home**, i.e.; well into his body.

5. **resolution** has five syllables.

Rod. Be near at hand ; I may miscarry in't.

Iago. Here, at thy hand ; be bold, and take thy stand.

Rod. I have no great devotion to the deed, *Retires.*
 And yet he hath given me satisfying reasons.
 'Tis but a man gone. Forth, my sword : he dies. 10

Iago. I have rubb'd this young quat almost to the
 sense,

And he grows angry. Now, whether he kill
 Cassio,

Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
 Every way makes my gain. Live Roderigo,
 He calls me to a restitution large
 Of gold and jewels that I bobb'd from him,
 As gifts to Desdemona ;
 It must not be. If Cassio do remain,

He hath a daily beauty in his life
 That makes me ugly ; and, besides, the Moor 20

8. no great devotion, a strong disinclination. Litotes.

10. 'Tis but a man gone. An echo, perhaps, of the
 satisfying reasons given him by Iago.

11. quat, pimple. the sense, the quick.

"I have fretted (or chafed) this young scamp beyond the limits
 even of his endurance." See 4. 2. 203.

14. Every way...gain, either of these alternatives
 will suit my purpose. Live Roderigo, if Roderigo lives.

16. bobb'd from him, fooled him out of, jockeyed out
 of him.

20. makes me ugly, makes me appear ugly by com-
 parison.



May unfold me to him ; there stand I in much
peril.

No, he must die : be it so. I hear him coming. *v.R. But soft*

Enter Cassio.

Rod. I know his gait, 'tis he.—Villain, thou diest !

[Makes a pass at Cassio.]

Cas. That thrust had been mine enemy indeed,

But that my coat is better than thou know'st. 25

I will make proof of thine.

[Draws and wounds Roderigo.]

Rod. O, I am slain !

[Iago from behind wounds Cassio in the leg and exit.]

Cas. I am maim'd for ever. Help, ho ! murder ! murder !

[Falls.]

Enter Othello [above at a window].

Oth. The voice of Cassio ! Iago keeps his word.

Rod. O, villain that I am ! *his conscience pricks him*

21. **unfold me**, expose or betray me.

23. **his gait**, his manner of going. *deportment*

He does not see him but he hears the sound of his footsteps in the dark.

25. **my coat**. Cassio wears a coat of chain-mail under his tunic.

25. **make proof of**, test the stoutness of **thine**.

Stage-direction. "An Iago always wounds from behind." Goll.

He had overheard Cassio's remark about his coat being of proof, and therefore wounds him in the leg.

27. **maim'd for ever**. He exaggerates, like Montano (2. 3. 164).

Stage-direction. Above at a window. Othello appears for a moment at the balcony of the stage. He looks on as a spectator, but takes no part in the action.

Oth. It is even so.

Cas. Oh, help, ho! light! a surgeon!

Oth. 'Tis he!—O brave Iago, honest and just,
That hast such noble sense of thy friend's wrong!
Thou teachest me. Minion, your dear lies dead,
And your unblest fate hies; strumpet, I come.
drawing high Forth of my heart those charms, thine eyes, are
blotted; *out of my memory* *require bed* 35
Thy bed, lust-stain'd, shall with lust's blood be
spotted.

Exit.

Enter Lodovico and Gratiano.

Cas. What, ho! no watch? no passage? Murder!
murder!

Gra. 'Tis some mischance; the voice is very direful. *accident*

Cas. Oh, help!

33. Thou teachest me, thou settest me a good example.
Minion, minx, jade.

34. your...fate hies, your end is imminent. unblest.
This is explained in 4. 2. 36-37. 35. Forth, out.

36. Cp. 4. 1. 220-223.

37-129. The noise of the fray summons many persons to the spot. Lodovico and Gratiano arrive, and Iago re-enters in his night-shirt—a circumstance suggesting that he, like the others, has just been aroused from his midnight rest—and dispatches Roderigo, who had been already wounded in the fray with Cassio. Bianca soon appears on the scene, bitterly bewailing her wounded paramour. Iago manifests much commiseration for his wounded "brother," as he calls Cassio. It is he that binds up his wounds and calls for a chair to bear him out of the night air. He thereupon accuses Bianca of being a party to the crime and sends Emilia to the castle to inform Othello of what has taken place.

37. no passage? no passing of people? Cp. *C. of Errors*, 3. 1. 99 ("the stirring passage of the day").



Lod. Hark!

40

Rod. O wretched villain!

Lod. Two or three groan. It is a heavy night,
These may be counterfeits; let's think't unsafe
To come in to the cry without more help.

Rod. Nobody come? Then shall I bleed to death. 45

Re-enter Iago, with a light.

Lod. Hark!

Gra. Here's one comes in his shirt, with light and
weapons.

Iago. Who's there? Whose noise is this that cries
on murder?

Lod. We do not know.

Iago. Do not you hear a cry?

Cas. Here, here! for Heaven's sake help me!

Iago. What's the matter? 50

Gra. This is Othello's ancient, as I take it.

Lod. The same indeed; a very valiant fellow.

Iago. What are you here that cry so grievously?

Cas. Iago? Oh, I am spoil'd, undone by villains!

Give me some help. 55

Iago. O me, lieutenant! what villains have done this?

Cas. I think that one of them is hereabout, *Ref. to R.*

And cannot make away. *get away: he is wounded*

42. a heavy night, *dark* a gloomy night.

44. to come into the cry...help. Lodoyico is too
cowardly to go to the assistance of the wounded men.

48. cries on murder, calls out "murder." *repeatedly cries murder*

51. as I take it. He is peering into the darkness and
uncertain what he sees. See 65 and 88, below.



Iago. O treacherous villains!

What are you there?—Come in, and give some
help.

[*To Lodovico and Gratiano.*]

Rod. O, help me there!

60

Cas. That's one of them.

Iago. O murderous slave! O villain!

[*Iago sets down his light; makes towards Roderigo in the
dark, and stabs him.*]

Rod. O damn'd Iago! O inhuman dog!

Iago. Kill men i' the dark!—Where be these bloody
thieves?—

How silent is this town!—Ho! murder! murder!—

What may you be? Are you of good or evil? 65

Lod. As you shall prove us, praise us.

Iago. Signior Lodovico?

Lod. He, sir.

Iago. I cry you mercy. Here's Cassio hurt by villains.

Gra. Cassio!

70

Iago. How is't, brother!

Cas. My leg is cut in two.

Iago. Marry, heaven forbid!

Light, gentlemen! I'll bind it with my shirt.

Enter Bianca.

Bian. What is the matter, ho! Who is't that cried?

Iago. Who is't that cried!

75

Bian. Oh, my dear Cassio! my sweet Cassio!

Oh, Cassio, Cassio, Cassio!

65. of good or evil, well disposed or ill disposed.

71. brother, comrade.



Iago. O notable strumpet! Cassio, may you suspect
Who they should be that have thus mangled you?

Cas. No.

80

Gra. I am sorry to find you thus; I have been to seek
you.

Iago. Lend me a garter. So. Oh, for a chair,
To bear him easily hence!

Bian. Alas, he faints! Oh, Cassio, Cassio, Cassio!

Iago. Gentlemen all, I do suspect this trash *Bianca* 85
To be a party in this injury.

Patience a while, good Cassio. Come, come;

Lend me a light. Know we this face or no?

Alas, my friend and my dear countryman

Roderigo? No:—yes, sure:—O heaven!

Roderigo.

90

Gra. What, of Venice?

Iago. Even he, sir; did know him?

Gra. Know him! ay.

Iago. Signior Gratiano? I cry your gentle pardon;
These blood accidents must excuse my manners,
That so neglected you.

Gra. I am glad to see you. 95

82. **a garter**: to hold the bandage in position. **So**,
very good; well bandaged: cp. 5. 2. 88 **a chair**, a sedan chair.

85. **I do suspect this trash**, etc. Iago, thinking that
anything will be believed against a woman in Bianca's walk
of life, fastens the guilt upon her, the better to shield him-
self. For **trash**=worthless creature cp. 2. 1. 312.

86. "To be involved in this crime."

The word **injury** has the sense of Latin *injuria*=an actionable
wrong.



Iago. How do you, Cassio? Oh, a chair! a chair!

Gra. Roderigo!

Iago. He he, 'tis he. [*A chair brought in.*] Oh, that's well said; the chair.

Some good man bear him carefully from hence;
I'll fetch the general's surgeon. (*To Bianca.*

For you, mistress,

100

Save you your labour.) He that lies slain here,
Cassio,

Was my dear friend. What malice was between
you?

Cas. None in the world; nor do I know the man.

Iago. (*To Bianca.* What, look you pale?) Oh, bear
him out o' the air.

[*Cassio and Roderigo are borne off.*]

Stay you, good gentlemen. (Look you pale,
mistress?)

105

Do you perceive the gastness of her eye?

(Nay, if you stare, we shall hear more anon.)

Behold her well; I pray you, look upon her.

100-101. Iago will not permit Bianca to render service to Cassio.

104. **bear him out o' the air**, take him indoors, out of the insalubrious night air.

Cp. *Hamlet*, 2. 2. 209, "Will you walk out o' the air?" (Will you come out for a walk?)

105. **Stay you.** "Stay behind; I have something to impart to you."

He detains Lodovico and Gratiano, (who were about to accompany the governor-elect to the castle,) that they may hear his accusation of Bianca.

106. **gastness**, ghastly paleness.



Do you see, gentlemen? Nay, guiltiness will
speak,

Though tongues were out of use.

110

Enter Emilia.

Emil. Alas, what's the matter? What's the matter,
husband?

Iago. Cassio hath here been set on in the dark
By Roderigo and fellows that are scap'd.
He's almost slain, and Roderigo quite dead.

Emil. Alas, good gentleman! alas, good Cassio! 115

Iago. This is the fruits of whoring. Prithee, Emilia,
Go know of Cassio where he supp'd to-night,
[*To Bianca.*] What, do you shake at that?

Bian. He supp'd at my house; but I therefore shake
not. *I am trembling: he is mortally wounded.*

Iago. O, did he so? I charge you, go with me. 120

109-110. **Guiltiness...use.** "Murder will out."

Iago makes the woman blush by his *accusation*, and then feigns to discover in her *bewilderment* the proof of the crime he brings against her. This method of implicating an innocent person in a crime is not peculiar to *Iago*.

(1) It is thus that *Claudio* accuses Hero (an early sketch of *Desdemona*) of unchastity (*Much Ado*, 4. 1. 43).

Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty.

(2) It is thus that *Gloucester* fastens Clarence's murder on Queen Elizabeth's kindred (*Richard III*, 2. 1. 136.)

Mark'd you not

How that the guilty kindred of the queen

Look'd pale when they did hear of Clarence's death?

112. **set on**, attacked, 117. **know of**, learn from.

120. **go with me**, come with me (as we now say).



Emil. Fie, fie upon thee, strumpet!

Bian. I am no strumpet, but of life as honest
As you that thus abuse me.

Emil. As I? Foh! Fie upon thee!

Iago. Kind gentlemen, let's go see poor Cassio
dress'd. *wounds being attended to*

Come, mistress, you must tell's another tale. 125

Emilia, run you to the citadel,
And tell my lord and lady what hath happ'd.
Will you go on afore? [*Aside.*] This is the
night.

That either makes me or fordoes me quite. *ruined*

Exeunt.

Scene II

[*A bedchamber in the castle :*] *Desdemona in bed*
[*asleep*].

Enter Othello with a light.

Oth. It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,—

124. **see...dress'd**, see dressing applied to his wound.

125. **you must...tale**, you must not expect us to believe
that story.

"You cannot creep out at that hole." *Heart of Midlothian.*

129. **fordoes me quite**, destroys me utterly.

Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!—
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood,
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster.
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
Put out the light,—and then put out the light.
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,

5

1-22. Othello finds his wife asleep and looking the very picture of beauty and innocence. The deed he is about to perpetrate is one from which his whole nature recoils, and he is appalled as he thinks that, once it is done, it can never be undone; but he nerves himself to the task by considering that the killing of his wife is a sacrifice which he owes to offended Justice (17).

1. **It is the cause**, etc.; the cause to which, on his knees, he had engaged his soul "in the due reverence of a sacred vow" (3. 3. 461).

"The iteration of the phrase 'It is the cause' serves admirably to denote the need he feels for urging upon himself the instigating motive for his proposed act" (Clarke).

2. **chaste**, stainless.

"The epithet 'chaste' suggests the nature of the cause which the purity of the stars forbids to be named in their presence" (Hudson).

3. "Othello advances to the bed, half drawing his sword; then he suddenly stops and returns the sword to the scabbard."—*German Acting Edition*.

5. **monumental alabaster**=a figure cut out in alabaster to decorate a tomb.

This substance is noted for its smoothness and dazzling whiteness.

7. **the light**, the taper; **the light**, the light of life, *i.e.*, Desdemona's life.

8. **flaming minister**: a periphrasis for a brightly burning light.



I can again thy former light restore,
 Should I repent me ; but once put out thy light, 10
 Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
 I know not where is that Promethean heat
 That can thy light relume. When I have
 pluck'd the rose

I cannot give it vital growth again,
 It needs must wither ; I'll smell it on the tree. 15

Kisses her.

Oh, balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
 Justice to break her sword ! One more, one
 more.

Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill
 thee

And love thee after. Once more, and that's the
 last ;

So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep, 20
 But they are cruel tears. This sorrow's
 heavenly ;

11. "Thou loveliest specimen of Nature's handiwork."

12. **Promethean heat.** A metaphor from Greek mythology, alluding to the *fire* stolen by the demigod Prometheus from Olympus and here applied to the inner principle in man which inspires and infuses *life*.

Othello must put out the light of "those charms, her eyes,"
 (5. 1. 35) : Shakespeare wrote in *Love's Labours Lost* (4. 3. 350) :

From woman's eyes this doctrine I derive :
 They sparkle still the right *Promethean fire*.

13. **relume**, rekindle.

16. **balmy**, delicious, fragrant : cp. 2. 3. 258.

20. "Nothing was ever so sweet and yet so baneful."

It strikes where it doth love. She wakes,

Des. Who's there? Othello?

Oth. Ay, Desdemona.

Des. Will you come to bed, my lord?

Oth. Have you pray'd to-night, Desdemon?

Des. Ay, my lord.

Oth. If you bethink yourself of any crime
Unreconcil'd as yet to Heaven and grace,
Solicit for it straight. 26

Des. Alack, my lord, what may you mean by that?

Oth. Well, do it, and be brief; I will walk by. 30
I would not kill thy unprepared spirit;
No; heavens forbend! I would not kill thy soul.

22. **It strikes where it doth love.** "To me it is evident," writes De Quincey, "that Othello's state of feeling was not that of a degrading suspicious rivalry, but the state of misery arising out of this dilemma, the most affecting, perhaps, to contemplate, of any which can exist—viz., the dire necessity of loving, beyond limit, one whom the heart pronounces to be unworthy of that love." (*Masson's Edition*, i. 174.)

23-88. Desdemona awakes and Othello bids her prepare for death,—and the menacing tones of his voice and the rolling of his eyes plainly tell her that she is upon her death-bed. Her protestation of innocence merely rouses him to anger—such proofs he has of her guilt that her denials cannot alter his purpose. When he tells her that Cassio has confessed to having used her unlawfully, she implores him to send for Cassio; and the tears she sheds at the news that Iago has stopped Cassio's mouth so rouse his animosity that in a white heat of passion he smothers her under her pillows before she can say a prayer.

27. **Unreconcil'd**, not repented of, not forgiven.

28. **Solicit for it straight**, seek pardon for it instantly.

30. **walk by**, go apart, leave you alone.

32. **heavens forbend!** God forbid such a thought!



Des. Talk you of killing?

Oth. Ay, I do.

Des. Then Heaven
Have mercy on me!

Oth. Amen, with all my heart!

Des. If you say so, I hope you will not kill me. 35

Oth. Hum!

Des. And yet I fear you; for you're fatal then
When your eyes roll so. Why I should fear
I know not,
Since guiltiness I know not; but yet I feel I
fear.

Oth. Think on thy sins.

Des. They are loves I bear to you.

Oth. Ay, and for that thou diest. 41

Des. That death's unnatural that kills for loving.
Alas, why gnaw you so your nether lip?
Some bloody passion shakes your very frame.

Cp. 186, below. "Forfend" is a stronger word than "defend" (1. 3. 267),—another Shakespearian equivalent for "forbid."

36. **Hum!** An inarticulate nasal sound expressing indignation.

37. **fatal**, in deadly earnest.

38. **When your eyes roll so.** Burton (*Anatomy of Melancholy*, p. 640, Tegg's ed.) describes this as "a strange gesture proper to jealousy."

40. **loves I bear to you.** Cp. *Winter's Tale*, 1. 2. 83 ff.

42. **That death's unnatural...loving.** Cp. *Richard III*, 1. 2. 134:

It is a quarrel most unnatural
To be revenged on him that loveth you.



These are portents ; but yet I hope, I hope,
They do not point on me.

45

Oth. Peace, and be still !

Des. I will so. What's the matter ?

Oth. That ^{this thought} handkerchief which I so lov'd and gave thee
Thou gav'st to Cassio. *whole truth revealed at the 10th line*

Des. No, by my life and soul !

Send for the man, and ask him. *uprightness of*

Oth. Sweet soul, take heed, 50

Take heed of perjury ; thou art on thy deathbed.

Des. Ay, but not yet to die.

Oth. Yes, presently :

Therefore confess thee freely of thy sin ;

For to deny each article with oath

Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception

That I do groan withal. Thou art to die. 55

Des. Then Lord have mercy on me !

Oth. I say, amen.

Des. And have you mercy too ! I never did

Offend you in my life ; never lov'd Cassio

But with such general warranty of heaven *as a fellow creature*

As I might love ; I never gave him token. *how* 60

45. portents, evil omens.

46. point on me, aim at, are directed at me.

54. article, particular, item.

55-56. conception...groan. A metaphor from child-bearing. withal : see note on 1. 3. 93.

59. Offend you, do you wrong, sin against you.

60. warranty of heaven. See 1 Thessalonians, 4. 9, and 1 John, 3. 11 ; and cp. note on 4. 1. 244.

Oth. By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's hand.
 O perjur'd woman! thou dost stone my heart,
 And makest me call what I intend to do
 A murder, which I thought a sacrifice. 65
 I saw the handkerchief.

Des. He found it then;
 I never gave it him. Send for him hither;
 Let him confess a truth.

Oth. He hath confess'd.

Des. What, my lord?

Oth. That he hath us'd thee.

Des. How? unlawfully?

Oth. Ay. 70

Des. He will not say so.

Oth. No, his mouth is stopp'd; *deaf*

Honest Iago hath ta'en order for't. *measures*

Des. Oh, my fear interprets. What, is he dead?

Oth. Had all his hairs been lives, my great revenge
 Had stomach for them all. 75

63. **O perjur'd woman:** see note on 4. 2. 37.
stone my heart, turn my heart to stone.

"Thou dost harden my heart by denying thy guilt, and causest me to kill thee from wrath at thy perjury, when I intended thy death to be a sacrifice made to justice" (Clarke).

72. **ta'en order for't,** taken steps to secure its being done.

74. "Even if he had myriads of lives." Cp. 3. 3. 442.

75. **stomach,** rancour.

76. **Alas! he is betray'd and I undone.** It is part of Desdemona's "wretched fortune" ever to be saying the wrong thing at the worst possible time, but nothing she says in the whole play is



Des. Alas ! he is betray'd and I undone.

Oth. Out, strumpet ! weep'st thou for him to my face ?

Des. O, banish me, my lord, but kill me not !

Oth. Down, strumpet !

Des. Kill me to-morrow ; let me live to-night !

80

Oth. Nay, if you strive,—

Des. But half an hour !

Oth. Being done, there is no pause.

Des. But while I say one prayer !

Oth. It is too late.

He smothers her.

Emil. (*At the door.*) My lord, my lord ! What, ho !

so ill-timed as this. She *means* her words in one sense but Othello *understands* them in quite another, and the fatal misconstruction he puts upon them hurries her to her death.

(1) She had requested Othello to send for Cassio to bear witness to her innocence, and had been told that it was *too late*, that Cassio's mouth had been stopped by Iago. Then at last her dormant suspicions awake, and the truth—the actual truth—rushes into her mind, and she sees that Cassio has fallen a victim to Iago's treachery. She weeps over the betrayal of Cassio and is in despair about her own fate, not having Cassio now to clear her.

(2) Othello sees in her *tears* an ocular demonstration of her grief for her paramour, and hears in her *words* a despairing cry because their sin has found them out, having been brought to Othello's knowledge by the "honest" Iago. She says she is "undone," believing that the fate that has overtaken Cassio is awaiting herself ! This heats Othello's jealousy to the boiling-point, and he smothers his wife in an access of blind fury.

82. **Being done...pause.** "Now that it is being done, there can be no pause" (Hart).

85. Emilia's clamour outside the door has been compared to the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth* : it brings back the action of the



my lord, my lord ! 85

Oth. What noise is this? Not dead? not yet quite
dead?

I that am cruel am yet merciful ;
I would not have thee linger in thy pain.
So, so.

Emil. (*Within.*) What, ho ! my lord, my lord !

Oth. Who's there ?

Emil. [*Within.*] O, good my lord, I would speak a
word with you ! 90

Oth. Yes :—'tis Emilia.—By and by.—She's dead.

play into the light of common day ; it is the outside world looking in and demanding its account. The *reaction* has commenced.

88. **So, so.** " He heaps more clothes around her, pressing the pillows more closely round her mouth" (Clarke).

There are seven instances in Shakespeare where "so" (as in 5. 1. 82) or "so, so," as here, accompanies some action done by the hands. See L. Campbell's *Tragic Drama*, pp. 262-3.

89-167. Sent by Iago (see 5. 1. 126), Emilia arrives too late to save Desdemona, but not too late to hear her dying moan, "A guiltless death I die." "The soul cannot away until it asserts the purity of the casket in which it has been set. It lingers on in its pain until the poor lips can speak, not, as before, to deaf ears that will not listen, but to those of a sympathizing woman" (Lady Martin).

When Emilia asked her who has done the deed, she replies, "Nobody ; I myself. Farewell !" And with her dying breath she commends herself to her kind lord. For one instant Othello shields himself behind Desdemona's falsehood, but immediately thereafter confesses that he had slain her himself, averring that it had been proved to him "by her husband, honest, honest Iago" that she was false to wedlock. Emilia is frantic with grief and indignation, and raises through the castle a cry of "Murder ! murder."

91. **By and by.** (I will open the door) immediately.



'Tis like she comes to speak of Cassio's death
The noise was high. Ha! no more moving?
Still as the grave. Shall she come in?

Were't good?—

I think she stirs again:—no. What's best to
do? *what is the*

If she come in, she'll sure speak to my wife. 95

My wife! my wife! what wife? I have no wife.

Oh, insupportable! Oh, heavy hour!

Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse.

Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe 100

Should yawn at alteration.

Emil. [Within.] I do beseech you

That I may speak with you, Oh, good my lord!

Oth. I had forgot thee. Oh, come in, Emilia.

Soft; by and by.—Let me the curtains draw.—

Where art thou? [Unlocks the door.]

Enter Emilia.

What's the matter with thee now?

Emil. Oh, my good lord, yonder's foul murders done! 106

Oth. What, now?

Emil. But now, my lord.

Oth. It is the very error of the moon;

99-101. He feels that "chaos has come again" (3. 3. 92) in his inner world of man and he looks for an answering chaos in the outer world of nature. ("Comedy is mundane, tragedy is cosmic.")

"It is very obvious to me that his allusion is grounded on a certain solemn circumstance, when darkness is said to have covered the whole face of the land; when the rocks were rent; and graves opened (Matthew 27. 51)." Theobald.



She comes more near the earth than she was
wont, 110

And makes men mad.

Emil. Cassio, my lord, hath kill'd a young Venetian
Call'd Roderigo.

Oth. Roderigo kill'd!

And Cassio kill'd.

Emil. No, Cassio is not kill'd.

Oth. Not Cassio kill'd! Then murder's out of tune, 115

And sweet revenge grows harsh.

Des. O, falsely, falsely murder'd!

Emil. O Lord, what cry is that?

Oth. That! what?

109. **error**, aberration of **the moon** from her orbit (cp. the word "exorbitancy").

109-111. "Othello's cry is one of the most perfect of all the perfect things in the tragedies." John Masefield, *William Shakespeare* (H.U.L.), p. 186.

We are sceptical to-day about the influence of the moon on the *weather*, but Othello believed that its phases affected the *weather of the mind* (3. 3. 178), and here he credits the moon with the power of driving men out of their senses.

Let him not lack our sympathy though his way of thinking may be very remote from ours!

116. **harsh** can mean either (1) unpleasant to the ear = **out of tune**, or (2) unpleasant to the taste (antithetic to **sweet**).

117. **falsely**, wrongly, mistakenly. Cp. *King John* 4. 2. 198:

Standing on slippers, which his nimble haste
Had *falsely* thrust upon contrary feet.

Desdemona uses a word which, while it exonerates herself, does not thereby inculcate her husband.



Emil. Out, and alas ! that was my lady's voice.
 Help ! help, ho ! help ! O lady, speak again ! 120
 Sweet Desdemona ! O sweet mistress, speak !

Des. A guiltless death I die.

Emil. Oh, who hath done this deed ?

Des. Nobody ; I myself. Farewell !
 Commend me to my kind lord. Oh, farewell ! 125

Dies.

Oth. Why, how should she be murd'ed ?

Emil. Alas, who knows ?

Oth. You heard her say herself, it was not I.

Emil. She said so ; I must needs report the truth.

Oth. She's, like a liar, gone to burning hell.

'Twas I that kill'd her.

Emil. Oh, the more angel she, 130
 And you the blacker devil !

Oth. She turn'd to folly, and she was a whore.

Emil. Thou dost be-lie her, and thou art a devil.

119. **Out, and alas,** A cry of lamentation. Cp. " But out, alack ! " *Sonnet*, 33. 11.

" Emilia rushes to the bed and throws back the curtains." Booth.

124. She is loyal to her husband to the end and testifies to her belief in him with her dying breath. " The lie with which Desdemona dies is divine truth, too good to come within the earthly compass of an earthly moral code."—Franz Horn. " To tell truth, rightly understood, is not to state the true facts, but to convey a true impression ; truth in spirit, not truth to letter, is the true veracity... The lie of a good woman is the true index of her heart." R. L. Stevenson, *Virginibus Puerisque*, p. 76.

130. **Oh, the more angel she,** *i.e.*, she is all the more an angel for having spoken the falsehood.

132. **folly,** light conduct, wantonness.

Oth. She was false as water. *as inconstant as water*

Emil. Thou art rash as fire, to say
That she was false: oh, she was heavenly true! 135

Oth. Cassio did top her; ask thy husband else.
O, I were damn'd beneath all depth in hell
But that I did proceed upon just grounds
To this extremity. Thy husband knew it all.

Emil. My husband! 140

Oth. Thy husband.

Emil. That she was false to wedlock?

Oth. Ay, with Cassio. Nay, had she been true,
If Heaven would make me such another world
Of one entire and perfect chrysolite, 145
I'd not have sold her for it.

Emil. My husband!

Oth. Ay, 'twas he that told me on her first.
An honest man he is, and hates the slime

134. **as false as water.** Water is one of many types of
fickleness. Cp. *Troilus and Cressida*, 3. 2. 198: *...as false*
As air, as water, wind, or sandy earth.

139. **To this extremity,** to these extreme measures.

140. **My husband.** "The numerous repetitions of this exclamation (146, 149, and 152) serve to prove how impossible it is for Emilia to conceive that Iago can be guilty of so atrocious a calumny" (Clarke).

145. **chrysolite** was the name formerly given to several different gems of a green colour—topaz, tourmaline, etc.

148-149. **the slime that sticks.....deeds.** Cp. *Macbeth*, 5. 2. 17:

Now does he feel
His secret murders sticking on his hands.

That sticks on filthy deeds.

Emil.

My husband!

Oth. What needs this iterance, woman? I say thy
husband. 150

Emil. O mistress, villainy hath made mocks with
love!

My husband say that she was false!

Oth.

He, woman;

I say thy husband; dost understand the word?

My friend, thy husband, honest, honest Iago.

Emil. If he says so, may his pernicious soul
Rot half a grain a day! He lies to the heart.
She was too fond of her most filthy bargain. 155

Oth. Ha!

Emil. Do thy worst!

This deed of thine is no more worthy heaven 160
Than thou wast worthy her.

Oth.

Peace, you were best.

This is perhaps a Hebraism: cp. *Psalm* 7. 3, which should be rendered. "If iniquity *cling* to my hands."

150. **this iterance**, this iteration, this repetition.

151. **made mocks with**, played or sported with.

152. **My husband say**: cp. "She *give* it Cassio!"
(230).

These are two examples of "the uninflected form of the verb used to express the idea of the action of the verb as something to be rejected with scorn." For a third example see 1. 3. 340-341.

156. **Rot half a grain a day**, be put to death by the slowest torture.

160. **worthy heaven**, righteous in God's sight.

Emil. Thou hast not half that power to do me harm
 As I have to be hurt. O gull! O dolt!
 As ignorant as dirt! Thou hast done a deed
 Oh, oh,—
 (I care not for thy sword)—I'll make thee
 known,

165

162-163. **Thou hast.....hurt.** "I have in this cause power to endure more than thou hast power to inflict." Johnson.

Cp. *Winter's Tale*, 2. 3. 114: *Leontes*. I'll have thee burnt. *Paulina*. I care not.

163. **gull**, dupe. **dolt**, simpleton.

168-251. *The unmasking of Iago*—so dramatic by reason of its suddenness, its completeness and (not least) the unexpected quarter from which it comes—is one of the finest things in the play.

Emilia's piercing midnight cry meant for Iago the consummation of his devilish plans; and when Montano, Gratiano, and the others hastened to the spot, Iago came also among them. He comes to enjoy his triumph—to feast his eyes on the ruin he has wrought, to gloat in secret over Othello's woe, perhaps also (if occasion presents itself), to bewail in public the fate of the lady whose murder lies at his door—for this would be quite in keeping with his character, as we saw it in the previous scene.

How completely, then, must he have been taken aback by his wife's words of greeting—

Oh, are you come, Iago? you have done well,
 That men must lay their murders on your neck!

Iago is struck all of a heap, and the strange thing about it all is this, that what proves his undoing is his wife's passionate belief in his honesty—

Disprove this villain, if thou be'st a man!
 He says thou toldst him that his wife was false!
 I know thou didst not, thou'rt not such a villain!



Though I lost twenty lives.—Help! help, ho!
help!

The Moor hath kill'd my mistress! Murder!
murder!

Enter Montano, Gratiano, Iago, and others.

Mon. What is the matter? How now, general!

Emil. Oh, are you come, Iago? You have done
well,

That men must lay their murders on your
neck!

170

Gra. What is the matter?

Emil. Disprove this villain, if thou be'st a man!

He says thou told'st him that his wife was
false!

What can he say to this?—He can only tell Emilia, with all the authority he has over her as a husband, to hold her tongue—though this command is tantamount to an open avowal of his guilt. When she refuses to obey him (because, unknown to Iago, she has come under the influence of a higher loyalty than that which she owes to her husband), he turns to bay like a wild beast and in a fit of mad fury stabs her and rushes out, hoping to make good his escape. [Some stage-imagination is needed to realize the excitement of the "business" of Iago's flight.] The brave, devoted woman, feeling that her wound is mortal, asks to be laid beside her mistress, and again and again with her failing breath protests to the Moor the innocence of his wife.

169. **You have done well.** Ironical. This is a pretty kettle of fish; this is a pretty piece of work.

170. **lay...on your neck,** lay them at your door, make you responsible for them..

172. **a man**—(and not a devil, 287).



I know thou didst not, thou'rt not such a villain !

Speak, for my heart is full. 175

Iago. I told him what I thought, and told no more
Than what he found himself was apt and true.

Emil. But did you ever tell him she was false ?

Iago. I did.

Emil. You told a lie, an odious, damned lie ;| 180

Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie.

She false with Cassio !—did you say with
Cassio ?

Iago. With Cassio, mistress. Go to, charm your
tongue.

Emil. I will not charm my tongue ; I am bound to
speak.

My mistress here lies murdered in her bed,— 185

All. O heavens forbend !

Emil. And your reports have set the murderer on.

Oth. Nay, stare not, masters ; it is true, indeed.

175. **my heart is full.** I cannot endure this suspense.

177. **apt,** likely, “probal to thinking” (2. 2. 344).

“For observe, that Iago's disbelief in the virtue of Desdemona is not pretended, it is *real*. It arises from his total want of faith in all virtue ; he is no more capable of conceiving goodness, than she is capable of conceiving evil.” Mrs. Jameson.

179. **I did.** “Iago darts a quick, steely glance at her in defiance, but quails as she proceeds, and speaks line 183 with desperation.” Booth.

183. **charm your tongue,** be silent, lay your tongue
under a spell. **bound,** *in duty bound*.

187. **set on :** cp. 3. 3. 240 and 5. 1. 112.



Gra. 'Tis a strange truth. *incredible*

Mon. O monstrous act!

Emil. Villainy, villainy, villainy! 190

I think upon't,—I think: I smell't,—
O villainy!

I thought so then,—I'll kill myself for grief—
O villainy, villainy!

Iago. What, are you mad? • I charge you, get you,
home.

Emil. Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak; 195

'Tis proper I obey him, but not now.

Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home.

Oth. Oh, Oh, Oh.

He falls on the bed.

Emil. Nay, lay thee down and roar; *groan*

For thou hast kill'd the sweetest innocent

That e'er did lift up eye.

Oth. [*Rising.*] Oh, she was foul! 200

I scarce did know you, uncle; • there lies your niece,

189. **strange**, wonderful, incredible.

"This is one of many words [cp. "perplex'd," 346, below] which have lost weight and emphasis since Shakespeare's time, and it is in the deeper sense of the word that Gratiano employs it here."

Staunton.

191. **I smell't**: cp. *Hamlet*, 3. 3. 36:

Oh, my offence is rank; it *smells* to heav'n.

192. **I thought so then.** Emilia is wise after the event! She refers to half-formed suspicions which she interprets by the light of what has now taken place. She felt that some mischief was brewing, but had too good an opinion of her husband to identify him with the villain (see 4. 2. 139 ff.)

198. **Oh, oh, oh,** A man's agony of weeping.

Whose breath, indeed, these hands have newly
stopp'd.

I know this act shows horrible and grim.

Gla. Poor Desdemon! I am glad thy father's dead.

Thy match was mortal to him, and pure grief 205

Shore his old thread atwain. Did he live now,

This sight would make him do a desperate

turn,

Yea, curse his better angel from his side,

And fall to reprobance.

Oth. 'Tis pitiful; but yet Iago knows

210

That she with Cassio hath the act of shame

204. **I am glad thy father's dead.** "In that 'the gentle lady' never knew of her father's death, is the one tiny glimmering ray of comfort in this darkness." Furness.

205. **mortal**, fatal, deadly.

206. **Shore his old thread atwain**, gave the old man his death-blow, killed him.

"Shore" is the past tense of "shear" = "cut, as with shears."
"atwain" = "in two."

The allusion is to the three goddesses of destiny, whose names are Clotho, who spins the thread of life, Lachesis, who determines its length, and Atropos, who cuts it across.

207. **turn**, action, whether good or bad. (Cp. "a good turn," "an ill turn.")

208. **curse his better angel from his side.** Every human being is supposed to have two spirits attendant on him, one prompting him to good and the other to evil; this is alluded to in *Sonnet*, 144. 6:

My female evil

Tempteth my better angel from my side.

209. **reprobance**, reprobation, eternal perdition.



A thousand times committed. Cassio confess'd it ;
 And she did gratify his amorous works
 With that recognizance and pledge of love
 Which I first gave her. I saw it in his hand ; 215
 It was a handkerchief, an antique token
 My father gave my mother.

Emil. O God ! O heavenly God !

Iago. 'Zounds, hold your peace.

Emil. 'Twill out, 'twill out ! I peace !

213. gratify, show her gratitude for, requite.

214. recognizance, token, recognition.

217. **My father gave my mother.** Far too much, we think, has been read into the supposed inconsistency between these words and the statement given earlier in the play (3. 4. 55-56):

That handkerchief

Did an Egyptian to my mother give.

A gipsy was not likely to give away a costly handkerchief for *nothing*, and if we postulate that Othello's father paid for it and instructed the gipsy to make the presentation to his bride, what becomes of the discrepancy so frequently alleged ? On the strength of the divergence in the two accounts it has been suggested [by Sir Sidney Lee !] that Othello in the earlier scene *invented* the story of the handkerchief merely to alarm and impress his wife—which does not exalt Shakespeare's hero in the reader's estimation !

Where such minor discrepancies (and they are very frequent) are in question, it is useful to recall Rembrandt's caution to a friend who was examining some of his paintings a little too narrowly : " You should not *sniff* at my pictures,—the smell of the paint is unwholesome."

218. **O God ! O heavenly God !** " So the Quarto, and certainly rightly, though modern editors reprint the feeble alteration of the Folio, due to fear of the Censor, ' O heaven ! O heavenly Powers.' " Bradley, *Shakespearian Tragedy*, p. 240 f.n.

No; I will speak as liberal as the north. 220

Let Heaven and men and devils, let them all,

All, all, cry shame against me, yet I'll speak.

Iago. Be wise, and get you home.

Emil. I will not.

[*Iago offers to stab Emilia.*]

Gra. Fie!

Your sword upon a woman?

Emil. O thou dull Moor! that handkerchief thou

• speak'st of 225

I found by fortune and did give my husband;

For often, with a solemn earnestness,

(More than indeed belong'd to such a trifle),

He begg'd of me to steal it.

Iago. Villanous whore!

Emil. She give it Cassio! No, alas! I found it, 230

And I did give't my husband.

Iago. Filth, thou liest!

Emil. By heaven, I do not, I do not, gentlemen.

O murderous coxcomb! what should such a fool

Do with so good a wife?

220. as liberal as the north, as free and unrestrained
as the north wind.

Cp. *Cymbeline* 1. 3. 36: "the tyrannous breathing of the north."

223. *Stage-direction.* offers, attempts with violence.

Cp. *stage-direction*, *Comedy of Errors*, 4. 3. 108: "Enter three or four
and offer to bind him. He strives."

226. by fortune, by chance.

227. often: cp. "a hundred times" (3. 3. 229).

233. coxcomb: "equivalent to fool in the strongest
sense" (Rolfe):



Oth. Are there no stones in heaven
But what serves for the thunder?—Precious
villain!

235

He runs at Iago: Iago kills Emilia.

Gra. The woman falls; sure, he hath kill'd his wife.

Emil. Ay, ay! Oh, lay me by my mistress' side.

Exit Iago.

Gra. He's gone, but his wife's kill'd.

Mon. 'Tis a notorious villain. Take you this weapon

Which I have here recover'd from the Moor. 240

Come, guard the door without; let him not pass,

But kill him rather. I'll after that same villain,

234. **stones**, thunderstones. The same as thunderbolts.

"Does heaven reserve its thunder only to make a noise? has it no implements of mischief to *punish* as well as *terrify*?" Steevens.

The destruction caused by lightning was popularly supposed to be due to actual stones—the fossil shells known as belemnites were believed to have this origin.

235. **precious**, egregious, arrant.

This ironical use of "precious" is still common in colloquial speech.

235. *Stage-direction.* *Iago kills his wife.* "In a sense different from what he intended he is now 'even'd' with Othello, 'wife for wife' (2. 1. 308)." Moulton.

"He finds himself at the end of his resources. Raging with disappointment he stabs his wife, though his doing so is the completest proof that what she charged him with is true." Miller.

239. **notorious**, outrageous. 240. **recover'd**, obtained, taken. For this sense cp. *C. of Errors*, 2. 2. 76:

"To pay a fine for a periwig and *recover* the lost hair of another man.

241. **without**, on the outside.

"Without" when so used in the *text* has exactly the same meaning as "within" in the *stage-directions* (cp. 255, below).

For 'tis a damned slave.

Exeunt Montano and Gratiano.

Oth.

I am not valiant neither,

But every puny whipster gets my sword.

But why should honour outlive honesty? 245

Let it go all.

Emil.

What did thy song bode, lady?

Hark, canst thou hear me? I will play the swan,
And die in music. [*Singing.*] "Willow, willow,
willow!"—

Moor, she was chaste; she lov'd thee, cruel Moor;

So come my soul to bliss, as I speak true; 250

as oath as regards the chastity of D.

243. **not valiant neither.** The soldier's right arm has lost its nerve.

244. **puny whipster,** contemptible combatant (as he reckons Montano to be).

A "whipster" or "whipper-snapper" is one who is nimble in snatching a thing (here a weapon) from another person's hand.

245-246. He has been deprived of his sword, which means to a soldier the loss of his **honour**; but he sees the justice of this, having already lost his **honesty**. **Let it all go**, *i.e.*, let them *both* go.

Sir Sidney Lee and others give a different explanation: "Othello is thinking of his own *valour* and his wife's proven *chastity*."

246. **bode**, forbode, as in 4. 3. 59.

247. **play the swan...music.** It was believed that the swan sang only once, *viz.*, when it perceived its end approaching. Cp. *Lucrece*, 1. 6. 11:

• And now this pale swan in her watery nest
Begins the sad dirge of her certain ending.

So speaking as I think, alas, I die. *Dies.*

251. Emilia dies saying she is willing to stake her hopes of future bliss on the truth of her declaration that Desdemona was chaste.

"In his wife Emilia, Iago was evidently completely mistaken. He believed neither in her faithfulness to him nor in her personal heroism; hence his crimes are chiefly caused by his distrust of the former, while his final detection is mainly caused by his ignorance of the latter. Yet Emilia is sometimes regarded as a minor character in the tragedy, of which she is really and practically the true heroine."—Canning.

"Emilia's conduct at the close of the drama may indeed have taken herself as well as her husband by surprise. An alteration in the poise of her whole being has taken place unconsciously, and in the time of trial her new character bursts out into sudden flower. And so she nobly dies, and in her own degree becomes as signal a testimony as Desdemona to the reality of the awakened moral nature—which Iago leaves out of account as negligible and unsubstantial."—Miller.

Let us return for a moment to the words of in *A. 2. 23*. "And yet she'll kneel and pray; I have seen her do't." These were spoken in mockery, when Othello was saturated with the moral poison of Iago's cynicism. They strike us as among the most astonishing things in the play. Does not Shakespeare give us a hint in them that the weapons which were to overthrow Iago—who had sneered at the very idea of his plot being "too hard for [his] wits and all the tribe of hell" (*1. 3. 364*) to compass—were to be weapons from heaven's armoury? Tracing back effects to causes, might we not say that Iago's *devilry* is overthrown in the last resort by Desdemona's *sanctity* (sneeringly called *sanctimony*, it will be remembered, in Iago's speech just alluded to).

The cynicism and the sneering suggest the speech in Goethe's *Faust* in which Mephistopheles is forced to pay tribute to the sagacity of Margaret's mother, after this "sanctimonious" woman has put his nose out of joint over the affair of the gift of the jewels. The following is from John Stewart Blackie's translation:

The woman has a delicate nose

That sniffing through her prayer-book goes

Oth. I have another weapon in this chamber ;
It is a sword of Spain, the ice-brook's temper,—
Oh, here it is. Uncle, I must come forth.

Gra. (*Within.*) If thou attempt it, it will cost thee
dear :

255

Thou hast no weapon, and perforce must suffer.

Oth. Look in upon me then and speak with me,
Or naked as I am, I will assault thee.

[*Re-enter Gratiano.*]

Gra. What is the matter ?

Oth. Behold, I have a weapon ;

A better never did itself sustain

260

And seldom scents a thing in vain,
If it be holy or profane.

252-282. Othello's sword has been wrenched out of his hand and he is a prisoner in his own chamber (see 241 and 254). But he has found another weapon—a sword of Spain—and, his old intrepid spirit asserting itself, he meditates breaking through every obstacle and seeking flight in safety (259-264). But this is only a momentary thought.—“Where should Othello go?” (271) and how could he turn his back upon Desdemona, the be-all and the end-all of his existence?—He resolves to remain where he is and to offer no resistance to lawful authority.

253. **the ice-brook's temper.** To bring the blade of a sword to the proper degree of hardness and toughness it is first heated in the forge and then plunged into cold water. This last process is known as *tempering*. “Spanish blades” (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1. 4. 84) were famous for these qualities.

256. **suffer, acquiesce, be passive.**

258. **naked, unarmed.** Cp. 2 *Henry IV*, 3.2.234 :

And he but *naked*, though lock'd up in steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.

260. **itself sustain, hang by its belt.**



Upon a soldier's thigh. I have seen the day
 That, with this little arm and this good sword,
 I have made my way through more impediments
 Than twenty times your stop. But (oh, vain boast!)
 Who can control his fate? 'tis not so now. 265
 Be not afraid though you do see me weapon'd;
 Here is my journey's end, here is my butt
 And very sea-mark of my utmost sail.
 Do you go back dismay'd? 'Tis a lost fear,
 Man but a rush against Othello's breast 270
 And he retires. Where should Othello go?
 Now, how dost thou look now? O ill-starr'd wench!
 Pale as thy smock! when we shall meet at compt,
 This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,

263-264. more impediments...stop, more obstacles than twenty times as many as those by which you seek to stop me.

267. my butt, my goal, the term of my existence.

268. sea-mark...sail, the goal of my life's voyage.

269. 'Tis a lost fear, your dread of me is groundless.

271. Man but a rush, etc. Direct the feeblest weapon against my body.

The "rush" is here the emblem of fragility. The metaphor is from the manning of a gun.

272. ill-starr'd. Her name, as we have seen, is a mere variation of "dusdaimonia" in Greek (p. 235). wench: a term of affectionate address to a young woman.

Cp. *Tempest*, 1. 2. 130: [Prospero to Miranda.] "Well demanded, wench."

273. smock, chemise, a woman's under-garment. compt, the last great account, the judgment-day.



And fiends will snatch at it. Cold, cold, my girl ! 275
 Even like thy chastity. O cursed, cursed slave !
 Whip me, ye devils,
 From the possession of this heavenly sight !
 Blow me about in winds ! roast me in sulphur !
 Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire ! 280
 O Desdemona ! Desdemona ! dead !
 Oh ! Oh ! Oh !

*Enter Lodovico, Montano, Cassio carried in a chair, and
 Officers, with Iago [prisoner].*

Lod. Where is this rash and most unfortunate man ?

Oth. That's he that was Othello ; here I am.

275. **fiends will snatch at it.** Cp. 4. 2. 26-37.

"No fear that 'when they meet at compt' her look 'will hurl his soul from heaven.' Her infinite love and pity will think but of his sufferings, and will plead for the forgiveness he dares not ask for himself."—Lady Martin.

"The lips that had pardoned him in this life," says Mr. Boas, "will not plead against him in the next ; and in that world where men see not as through a glass, darkly, but face to face, Othello and Desdemona may yet find (*Sonnet*, 119, 11)—

'That ruin'd love when it is built anew,
 Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.' "

377—282. Othello calls down punishments upon his own head to atone for his crime and cleanse his polluted soul.

steep-down, precipitous.

Recalling the time when she acted Desdemona, Lady Martin writes, "As I lay there, he [Macready, her Othello] seemed to me like a soul in hell, whirling in the second circle of the Inferno. And there was a piteousness, a pathos, in his reiteration of the loved one's name that went to my very heart."



Lod. Where is that viper? Bring the villain forth. 285

Oth. I look down towards his feet; but that's a fable.

If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee.

[Wounds Iago.]

Lod. Wrench his sword from him.

Iago. I bleed, sir; but not kill'd.

Oth. I am not sorry neither. I'd have thee live;

For, in my sense, 'tis happiness to die. 290

Lod. O thou Othello, that wert once so good,

283—337. Authority now appears in the persons of Lodovico, Plenipotentiary of the Duke of Venice, and Cassio, Governor-elect of Cyprus. With them come officers to arrest Othello, who bring with them Iago as their prisoner. The Moor wounds Iago, but does not kill him. Iago will not open his mouth—either to vindicate himself or to confess his guilt. But letters are produced which reveal the hidden secrets of his dark plot.

284. he that was Othello, the shadow of a once mighty name (*magni nominis umbra*).

286. I look down towards his feet: to see if his feet be cloven, as the devil's are supposed to be.

"Dalgetty's first glance was to the stranger's feet, but he saw neither the cloven foot which Scottish legends assign to the foul fiend, nor the horse's hoof by which he is distinguished in Germany." *A Legend of Montrose*, chap. xiii.

"Hatteraick looked at Glossin from head to heel.—'I don't see the goat's foot,' he said:—'and yet he must be the very deyvil!'" *Guy Mannering*, chap. xxxiv.

288. I bleed, sir; but not kill'd. "You see, sir, he is right; you see that I am a devil!"

"This is one of the greatest speeches in Shakespeare, and the innocent commentators who have asked whether Shakespeare 'did not hate Iago' can never have apprehended it."—Saintsbury.

290. In my sense, to my thinking, 'tis happiness to die. Cf. Hamlet's dying words to Horatio, beseeching



Fallen in the practice of a cursed slave,
What shall be said to thee?

Oth. Why, anything.

An honourable murderer, if you will;
For ought I did in hate, but all in honour. 295

Lod. 'Tis wretch hath part confess'd his villainy.
Did you and he consent in Cassio's death?

Oth. Ay.

Cas. Dear general, I never gave you cause.

Oth. I do believe it, and I ask your pardon. 300

Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil
Why he hath thus ensnar'd my soul and body?

Iago. Demand me nothing; what you know, you know.
From this time forth I never will speak word.

Lod. What, not to pray?

Gra. Torments will ope your lips. 305

Oth. Well, thou dost best.

Lod. Sir, you shall understand what hath befallen,

him not to drink the poison (*Hamlet*, 5. 2. 358) :

*Absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.*

292. **in the practice**, into the snare, by the stratagem.

297. **consent in**, agree in planning.

301. **demi-devil**, half-devil.

302. **ensnar'd** : cp. 2. 1. 170 and 2. 3. 367-368.

303. **Demand me nothing**, ask me no questions.

"I grind my teeth at this, not because it 'takes,' but because I feel that it expresses determination never to speak again."—Booth, the actor.

307—329. This episode recapitulates earlier scenes in the play. Objection has been taken to it on the ground that the reader and spectator are already informed about the matters to which it relates.



Which, as I think, you know not. Here is a letter
Found in the pocket of the slain Roderigo,
And here another. The one of them imports 310
The death of Cassio to be undertook
By Roderigo.

Oth. O villainy!

Most heathenish and most gross!

Lod. Now here's another discontented paper,
Found in his pocket too; and this, it seems, 315
Roderigo meant to have sent this damned villain;
But that belike Iago in the interim
Came in and satisfied him.

Oth. Ob, thou pernicious caitiff!—
How came you, Cassio, by that handkerchief
That was my wife's?

Cas. I found it in my chamber; 320
And he himself confess'd but even now
That there he dropp'd it for a special purpose

"But Othello" says Hart, in reply to this criticism, "has asked for information; Iago will not give it; why should he not be satisfied? How otherwise is Cassio to be fully restored to his rightful place in Othello's estimation before all is over?"

310. imports, bears as its purport (see 2. 2. 3). *indicated*

313. "The sense is improved and the metre is rectified when we perceive that the original printer mistook the word "villanie" [villainy] for the word "villaine." Swinburne.

314. discontented paper, reproachful letter. Transferred epithet.

317. belike, very likely. interim, interval.

318. satisfied him, gave him enough, killed him: see 4. 2. 203. caitiff, wretch (see 4. 1. 109).

Which wrought to his desire.

Oth. the intricate knots

O fool! fool! fool!

Cas. There is besides in Roderigo's letter,
How he upbraids Iago, that he made him 325
Brave me upon the watch, whereon it came
That I was cast; and even but now he spake,
(After long seeming dead), 'Iago hurt him,
Iago set him on.'

Lod. You must forsake this room, and go with us. 330
Your power and your command is taken off,
And Cassio rules in Cyprus. For this slave,
If there be any cunning cruelty
That can torment him much and hold him long,
It shall be his. You shall close prisoner rest, 335
Till that the nature of your fault be known
To the Venetian state. Come, bring away.

Oth. Soft you; a word or two before you go.

323. **O fool! fool! fool!** "It is needless to remind those who saw Kean in this passage of the marvellous use he made of the occasion,—his eye wandering in vacancy, as stupefied by amazement, remorse, and despair,—and the clasped hands, palms upwards, gathered across his head,—exclaiming the while, with trembling, gasping utterance, and in agonized tones: 'Fool! fool! fool!'" *Life of Kean.*

326. **Brave me,** defy me, attack me.

327. **cast:** cp. 2. 3. 274. **spake,** said. *dismissed*

333. **cunning,** dexterously devised, "refined." *skillful*

334. **hold him long,** give him prolonged agony.

335. **close prisoner rest,** be kept in strict confinement.

337. **Come, bring away.** Addressed to the officers.

338-359. Othello, about to be led away, asks permission to speak. He has partially recovered his mental composure, and the words



I have done the state some service, and they
know't.

No more of that. I pray you, in your letter, 340
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am ; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
Of one that lov'd not wisely but too well ;
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought 345
Perplex'd in the extreme ; of one whose hand

he now utters are marked by surpassing nobility and pathos. He glances at his long services to the Venetian state,—but checks himself immediately. Then he asks Lodovico to give an impartial report of these tragic occurrences to the senators (whom he ever thinks of as his “very noble and approv'd good masters”). “Neither excuse or gloze over my faults nor make me out to be worse than I am. Say that I loved my lady, alas ! only too well, and that she whom I slew in a fit of jealous madness was the sum of all my happiness. I was like the ignorant Indian who threw away his pearl of greatest price ; but now that I realize the height of my frenzy, my tears flow faster from my eyes than Arabian trees shed their medicinal gums. Tell the senators, too, how once in Aleppo I smote a Turk who traduced the Venetian state—even as now I smite myself with my own weapon—” So saying, he snits his action to his word, falls on the bed beside Desdemona, and dies.

344. lov'd ... too well. “Love can be as cruel as death, as fierce as hate.”

345. being wrought, being worked upon (from without.) He alludes to Iago's cunning practices on his credulity.

346. perplexed = confounded, bewildered, driven to distraction, a stronger meaning than it bears to-day.

“We, the audience, know that Iago is a villain from the beginning ; but in considering the essence of the Shakespearian Othello we must perseveringly place ourselves in his situation and under his circumstances. Othello has no life but in Desdemona ; the belief that she,

(Like the base Indian) threw a pearl away
 Richer than all his tribe ; of one whose subdu'd
 eyes,

Albeit unused to the melting mood,

Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees 350

his angel, had fallen from the heaven of her native innocence, wrought a civil war in his heart. She is his counterpart ; and, like him, is almost sanctified in our eyes by her absolute unsuspiciousness, and holy entireness of love " (Coleridge).

347. **Like the base Indian.** These words suggest some fable about an Indian (here the type of an ignorant savage) who had cast away a priceless pearl which represented no value to him.

348. **subdu'd eyes,** eyes forced to weep.

349. **the melting mood :** " Niobe, all tears " (*Hamlet*, 1. 2. 149).

A mood fitter for a woman than for a warrior. Cp. *Julius Caesar*, 2. 1. 122. "The melting spirits of women." (See also *3 Henry VI* 2. 2. 41 and *Lucrece*, 1225).

" These words broke from him not without tears, though Desdemona was of no melting mood." *Heart of Midlothian*, chap. xli.

350. **Drops tears.** "The sudden deviation from past tense to present tense here has impressive effect ; it tends to make the weeping of the noble-natured man and brave soldier the more vividly actual and intense to the imagination of reader or spectator " (Clarke).

Quarto and Folio alike read "drops" : the laws of concord did not carry far in Shakespeare's time, and an intervening clause (e.g. "Albeit...mood") often renders them inoperative.

The laxity of grammar is still more striking in this example from *Venus and Adonis* (l. 1127) :

She lifts the coffer-lids that close his eyes,

Where, lo, two lamps, burnt out, in darkness lie.

Accepting Dr. Johnson's reading of "gums" for "gums" picture the seven-fold alliteration presents to the mind's eye !



Their medicinable gums. Set you down this;
 And say besides, that in Aleppo once;
 Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
 Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state,
 I took by the throat the circumcised dog, 355
 And smote him, thus. *He stabs himself.*

Lod. O bloody period!

Grat. All that's spoke is marr'd.

Oth. I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee: no way but this,
 Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.

[Falls on the bed, and] dies.

Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
 Their medicinal gums.

We see the pearls roll down the hero's face as he blubbers out his heart-broken shrill and gives himself his quietus with his sword.

351. **medicinable**, medicinal, having healing properties.

352. **in Aleppo**—where (we are told) it was a mortal sin for a Christian to molest any Turk.

Othello risked death with torture to uphold the honour of Venice.

353. **malignant.....turban'd**. The first of these furnishes the meaning ("full of malice"), the second supplies the picture. Shakespeare often combines adjectives thus. See Raleigh's *Shakespeare*, p. 224.

357. **period**, conclusion, termination. Cp. *1 Henry VI.* 2. 17:

The period of thy tyranny approacheth.

All that's spoke is marr'd. Mere words are impotent at a moment like this.

359-2 Study for ever Othello's two closing and summing-up: gather up all the terror that is past, as if not only the upgathered like sleeping flowers, but upgathered into the living flowers. I don't know how to avoid comparing—all unlike as

Cas. This did I fear, but thought he had no weapon ; 360
For he was great of heart.

Lod. [*To Iago.*] O Spartan dog.
More fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea !
Look on the tragic loading of this bed ;
'This is thy work. The object poisons sight ;
Let it be hid. Gratiano, keep the house, 365
And seize upon the fortunes of the Moor,

the characters are—the ends of Romeo and Juliet, Lear and Cordelia, Othello and Desdemona. I never can separate them. Love the mightiest torn asunder in life—re-united in death. Love, the solace of lapsed and mortal humanity.” Christopher North.

361. **For he was great of heart.** His self-inflicted death is the execution of the sentence he has passed upon his crime. “He is as ready to do right upon himself as ever he was to do it upon another” (Miller).

361-371. Lodovico's speech brings back the action into relation with the world at large: (1) He calls on Iago to look on the tragic loading of the bed, *which is his work*; (2) He tells Gratiano, as Othello's heir-at-law, to take possession of his fortunes. [What poet but *Shakespeare* would have thought of such a thing at such a time?] (3) He enjoins Cassio, as Lord Governor, to carry out Iago's sentence with the utmost rigour of the law. (4) He intimates that he is about to sail for Venice and that the duty will devolve upon him to relate this heavy act to the senate.

361. **Oh, Spartan dog.** “The reference seems to be to the determined silence of Iago, and to the proverbial silence of the Spartans under suffering, as well as to the savageness of the dogs.” Singer.

363. **loading**, load, burden.

365. **Let it be hid**, let the bed-curtains be drawn.

366. **seize upon**, take *legal* possession of (without any idea of *violence*). **the fortune**, the possessions.



For they succeed on you. To you, lord governe,
Remains the censure of this hellish villain;
The time, the place, the torture. O, enforce it!
Myself will straight aboard; and to the state 370
This heavy act with heavy heart relate.

Exeunt.

367. succeed on you, come down to you, fall by succession to you.

368. censure, judicial sentence (especially a condemnatory one).

371. "As the curtain drops, which do we pity most?"
Coleridge.

APPENDIX

I

4. 1. 77. Whilst you were here, *o'erwhelmed* with your grief.
So in most editions the verse runs, but the *Variorum* and others have it—

Whilst you were here, *ere while mad* with your grief.

The Folio has “o’re-whelmed” and the Quarto “ere while, mad”—very diverse readings, but we think it can be shown that only one of them came from Shakespeare’s pen.

In deciphering difficult manuscripts we are commonly more puzzled by vowels than consonants,—the latter being so much more distinctive in their outlines. Can it be accidental that, when we compare the rival readings here in question, we find the *consonants* the same in both, and only the *vowels* at variance? In the following combination

E R^E W H^I L^E M^A D
O R^E W H^E L^E M^E D

the printer has exhibited this agreement and difference to the eye by printing the constants in larger and the variants in smaller type, (the Folio vowels below the line and the Quarto vowels above it).

We leave the student to determine for himself which is the authentic reading and which is due to the mistake of printer or copyist.

II

5. 2. 34. “Indian” is the Quarto reading and “Iudean” that of the Folio. In support of the former, critics cite from Habington’s *Castara*:

“So the unskilful Indian those bright gems
Which might add majesty to diadems
'Mong the waves scatters;”

also from Sir Edward Howard’s *The Woman’s Conquest*:

“Behold my queen—
Who with no more concern I’ll cast away
Than Indians do a pearl that ne’er did know
Its value.”



Coleridge remarks—"Othello wishes to excuse himself on the score of ignorance, and yet not to excuse himself—to excuse himself by accusing. This struggle of feeling is finely conveyed in the word *base*, which is applied to the rude Indian, not in his own character, but as the momentary representative of Othello's. *Ind*—for I retain the old reading—means American, savage *in genere*.

Other critics, holding to the Folio, think that "the base *Indean*" refers to Judas Iscariot and that Othello in the anguish of his soul compares his terrible deed to the greatest crime ever committed in the world's history.
